



## **POST-SEASON COACHING REFLECTION**

*Preparing for next season starts now*

As another hockey season comes to a close, the off-season provides one of the most valuable opportunities for coaches: time to step back, reflect, and grow. The most effective coaching environments do not simply move from one season to the next. Instead, they follow a continuous cycle of development.

The end of the season is the ideal time to pause and reflect on what worked, what could be improved, and how we can create an even better experience for our players next year.

### **Evaluating the Season**

A thoughtful review of the season is one of the most powerful ways a coach can improve their practice. Taking time to reflect allows you to identify the moments where your team succeeded, the challenges that arose, and the lessons that can help guide future decisions.

Consider how your practices progressed throughout the season, how your players responded to the learning environment you created, and how your team culture evolved. Reflect on the development you observed in your players and think about the adjustments you might make if you were to coach the same season again.

Many coaches find it helpful to complete a short self-evaluation and gather feedback from players, parents, or their association. These perspectives often provide insights that may not be immediately visible from behind the bench.

In addition, conducting an end-of-season evaluation as a coaching staff can provide a comprehensive view of what worked well and where improvements can be made. Since the coaching staff spent the year collaborating closely, reviewing the season together helps identify strengths, address challenges, and align goals for the future. This collaborative reflection ensures that all voices are heard and supports continuous growth within the coaching team.

### **Understanding your Players Development**

Evaluating a season should also include a thoughtful look at player development. Success in youth hockey extends far beyond wins and losses. Coaches have the opportunity to influence players in a variety of ways that shape both their hockey skills and their overall experience in sport.

As you reflect on your team, think about how your players progressed technically with their skills. Consider their understanding of the game and their ability to make decisions under pressure. Physical development, confidence, and enjoyment of the game are also important indicators of progress.



Documenting these observations can be helpful when communicating with families and when planning for the future. Over time, these notes also allow coaches to track long-term development within their programs.

## Communicating with Players and Families

The end of the season is an important time to connect with players and their families. A short message recognizing the season and acknowledging the effort and commitment shown by the team can leave a lasting positive impression.

If your team is hosting an end-of-season celebration or wind-up event, take time to thoughtfully prepare any speeches or remarks you plan to deliver. Speaking from the heart is important, but preparing in advance helps ensure you recognize all players, thank key contributors, and share meaningful reflections on the season. A prepared speech also allows you to communicate your appreciation with clarity and confidence, making the moment memorable for everyone involved.

Many coaches choose to share a brief summary of the season while highlighting the growth they observed in the group. Individual messages to players can also be meaningful, particularly when they recognize effort, improvement, and positive attitudes. When appropriate, coaches may also share suggestions for off-season activities that can help players continue developing their skills while maintaining their enjoyment of the game.

## Continuing Your Growth as a Coach

Just as we encourage our players to keep learning, the off-season is also an opportunity for coaches to continue developing their own knowledge and skills. This could include attending coaching conferences, connecting with mentors, or exploring new ideas related to leadership and athlete development through peer-reviewed journals.

Even small learning opportunities can have a meaningful impact on the way practices are designed, how teams communicate, and how players experience the game. Coaches who remain curious and open to new ideas often create the most positive and progressive environments for their athletes.

For practical resources, consider *LTAD 3.0* (Balyi, Way, & Higgs) or *Developing the Whole Athlete* (Bomba & Buzzichelli) for athletic development, and *Legacy* (Kerr) or *Wooden on Leadership* (Wooden & Jamison) for leadership and team culture. You can also learn a lot through The Coaches Site and the NHL Coach Mentorship Program, which offer education and mentorship from experienced coaches.

Online learning and coaching resources:

- **Hockey Canada Learning Lab** (insert hyperlink): All online courses are open for registration. Coaches can also sign back into their Hockey Canada Registry account and, through the *My Courses* tab, review content and resources from completed courses.



- **Coaching Association of Canada – Locker** (insert hyperlink): Great eLearning resources and professional development modules for coaches.
- **The Coaches Site** (insert hyperlink): An email was sent inviting coaches to join our group on The Coaches Site. If you don't have a subscription, you can access a free 30-day trial. Registration for The Coaches Site Live event is now open on their website.
- **NHL Coaches' Association Mentorship Program** (insert hyperlink): Mentorship and learning opportunities from experienced coaches.
- **Coach Them** (insert hyperlink): Our partnered drill draw platform for building, organizing, and sharing practice plans.

## Preparing for the Next Season

The off-season also provides the space to begin thinking ahead. Some coaches find it helpful to start organizing their plans for the upcoming year by outlining an updated seasonal plan, reviewing their practice structure, and clarifying how they want to communicate with players and families. Taking this time to reflect and plan allows coaches to establish clear goals and expectations well before the new season begins, setting a positive tone for both player development and team culture.

Building a simple coaching package can also be valuable, particularly for coaches who are interested in applying for future opportunities. This package may include a coaching philosophy, a seasonal development plan, a practice approach, communication strategies, and examples of previous coaching experiences. Assembling these materials not only prepares coaches for future roles but also helps consolidate and clarify their approach to coaching. Preparing these materials not only supports future applications but also helps coaches clarify their own coaching identity and philosophy. By reflecting on their guiding principles and the methods they use to develop players, coaches can better articulate their strengths and values, both to themselves and to others.

If you are preparing for a coaching interview, use this off-season work to shape a clear story: who you are as a coach, how you develop players, and how you lead people. Bring a one-page coaching philosophy, a sample 4–6 week practice plan, and a brief outline of your team standards and communication approach. Be ready with a few specific examples (a challenge you faced, how you handled it, and what you learned), and line up 2–3 references who can speak to your leadership and reliability. Thoughtful preparation in these areas will help you communicate your approach effectively and stand out during the interview process.

## Setting Personal Coaching Goals

Strong coaches continue to evolve each season. As you look ahead, consider identifying a few personal goals that will guide your development next year. These goals might relate to improving



practice design, expanding your technical teaching progressions, strengthening communication with players and families, or continuing your coaching education.

Setting clear goals helps ensure that each season builds on the previous one and that your coaching practice continues to grow over time.

## Building Your Coaching Network

Coaching is often at its best when ideas and experiences are shared. The off-season is a great time to connect with other coaches within your association or across the province. Conversations with peers and mentors can provide new perspectives, practical ideas, and encouragement.

A strong coaching network helps create a culture where learning and collaboration support the development of both coaches and players.

## Final Thought

While the off-season may mean time away from regular practices and games, it is also one of the most valuable periods for growth as a coach. The reflection and preparation that happen now can significantly influence the experience your players have next season.

By taking the time to evaluate, learn, and plan, you set the foundation for an even stronger environment for your athletes in the future.

## Post-Season Coaching Reflections: What, Why, and How

Rather than simply ticking boxes, use these prompts to guide your thinking as you wrap up the season. Each area encourages meaningful reflection and action, helping you set the stage for future growth while keeping things practical for busy coaches.

### Reflect on Your Season

- **Why?** Take time to capture lessons while they're fresh. This helps you recognize patterns—what worked, what didn't—and avoid repeating the same mistakes next year.
- **How?** Set aside 30–60 minutes to answer these questions: What went well? What held the team back? What would I keep or change? What do I want players to remember about this season?
- **What to Save?** Identify 3–5 key successes, 3–5 areas for improvement, and 1–2 priorities to focus on next year.



## Seek Feedback

- **Why?** Your perspective is from the bench; players and families experience the environment firsthand. Their input can reveal strengths and gaps in communication, culture, and logistics.
- **How?** Send a brief survey (5–8 questions) within two weeks of the final game, asking about practices, communication, team culture, and one suggestion for the future. Make it anonymous if possible.
- **Tip:** Share a summary (“What we heard / What we’ll do”) to show that feedback is valued.

## Document Player Development

- **Why?** These notes support return-to-play planning, future goal-setting, and consistent messaging with families.
- **How?** For each player, jot down two strengths, one growth area, and one off-season focus (e.g., edge work, puck protection, scanning). Keep your observations specific and coachable.
- **Tip:** Focus on habits and skills—what’s controllable—not on comparisons to teammates.

## Communicate Closing Messages

- **Why?** Ending the season intentionally reinforces team values and increases the likelihood players return next year.
- **How?** Write a team note: thank everyone, highlight growth, and outline next steps. For individuals (even just 2–3 sentences), recognize their effort, improvement, and one positive habit to keep building.

## Review Your Plans and Practices

- **Why?** Reviewing your approach shows whether your plans matched your players’ needs—and where time was lost or misused.
- **How?** Look back at 3–5 practice plans. Consider time spent on puck work, small-area games, teaching progressions, and whether each session had a clear theme. Note what consistently worked.

## Identify Coaching Growth Priorities

- **Why?** Growth is easier when focused. Small upgrades, chosen thoughtfully, compound over the course of a season.



- **How?** Select one technical area (e.g., skating mechanics, puck skills) and one leadership or communication area (e.g., feedback style, parent communication). Choose a resource for each (clinic, mentor, course, or book) and schedule it.

## Suggest Off-Season Development

- **Why?** Offering direction without pressure keeps development fun and supports long-term growth.
- **How?** Recommend 3–5 simple ideas: free play, other sports, a short at-home puck routine, skating sessions, or local camps. Emphasize consistency over intensity, and encourage rest.

## Organize Your Coaching Materials

- **Why?** Maintaining a coaching package saves time next season and supports future opportunities.
- **How?** Save one document containing your coaching philosophy, team standards, communication templates, a seasonal focus, and sample practice themes or drills suited to your age group.