



Coaching Tips/Reminders for Playoff Success

At playoff time, every team wants to win. Below are essential reminders and guidelines for coaches to give their team the best chance at post-season success while at the same time supporting player experience. Employing these 5 Principles will help:

- Enhance individual and team performance under heightened pressure
- Foster a positive, supportive environment in which athletes feel prepared, confident, and able to enjoy their playoff journey together

1. Build player confidence prior to playoffs — designing practices that players will excel in

As the playoffs approach, structure practices around familiar, game-like drills and scenarios that players can execute well and feel comfortable with, and reinforce well-established skills, habits, and practice formats without removing challenge. Consistent success in these reps builds instinct and confidence, helping athletes stay composed and trust themselves and their training in high-pressure playoff moments.

2. K.I.S.S. (Keep It Simple, Smart) practices and game strategy

Playoffs are not the time to introduce new, complex systems or overcomplicate the game plan. Stick to the core fundamentals and familiar concepts your team has relied on all season. Keep practices and game preparation structured around clarity and execution rather than adding layers or experimenting so players can lean on well-rehearsed habits in high-pressure moments. Simple, familiar strategies help athletes react instinctively instead of overthinking — a critical advantage in high-intensity playoff hockey where time and space quickly disappear.

3. Building on good habits your team has developed, enjoy the playoff experience

Playoffs should feel like a continuation of the season's work, so reinforce the positive habits the team has already built — relentless effort, strong structure, disciplined positioning, quick transitions, support, and competitiveness. When players trust the habits and routines they learned from their training, they feel prepared and play with confidence. When a player is well prepared and confident, they can help their team succeed and enjoy their playoff experience, no matter their skill level.

4. Fair play & Emotional Regulation

During the playoffs, maintain sportsmanship and integrity: compete hard within the rules while prioritizing respect for opponents, officials, and teammates, and model that standard in every interaction with referees and the opposing bench. Emotions will run high, so teach players to regulate them—handling frustration after a (bad) call, managing nerves in a close game, and resetting quickly after mistakes—because emotional control under pressure drives performance and smart decisions. Coaches should lead with a calm demeanour and equip athletes with tools



such as deep breathing, visualization, positive self-talk, and simple reset routines. Teaching fair play and composure builds strong character and a positive team culture, increasing the likelihood of poised, intelligent play in critical moments.

5. Don't sour a player(s) experience by shortening the bench

Playoffs are meant to be an exciting, memorable experience for every player, so resist the urge to shorten the bench in key moments and remember that everyone has contributed throughout the season. Keep the whole roster involved so each player feels valued and motivated—confidence in your entire group lifts morale, and over the long run a well-rested, engaged team often outperforms one that leans on a few. You've invested a great deal of time and energy to create a positive experience this year—best of luck in your playoff games, and may you and your players fully enjoy the journey.