



## Coaching Tips/Reminders for Playoff Success

At playoff time, every team wants to win. Below is a list of essential guidelines for coaches to help give their team the best chance at post-season success. Following these principles can assist coaches in enhancing both individual and team performance during heightened-pressure situations, while also continuing to provide a supportive environment for their players.

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

Before playoffs, focus on practice drills and scenarios where players can succeed. This doesn't mean avoiding challenges, but rather reinforcing skills they have already developed. By designing drills and game-like situations they can execute well, players build confidence in their abilities. Confidence is crucial in high-pressure playoff games, as it helps players stay composed and trust their training when it matters most.

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

Playoffs are not the time to introduce complex new systems or overcomplicate the game plan. Stick to the core fundamentals that have been effective throughout the season. Keep practices structured and focused on execution rather than experimentation. Simple strategies allow players to react instinctively rather than overthink, which is critical in high-intensity games where time and space are limited.

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

The playoffs should be an extension of what the team has worked on all season. Reinforce positive habits such as strong defensive play, disciplined positioning, quick transitions, and relentless effort. If players trust their habits and routines, they'll feel prepared and play with confidence. This ensures that every player, regardless of skill level, can contribute and enjoy the experience of playoff hockey.

### 4. Fair play & Emotional Regulation

It's important to maintain sportsmanship and integrity during the playoffs. Competitive intensity will naturally rise, but respect for opponents, officials, and teammates should always be a priority. Encourage players to compete hard but within the rules, and lead by example in how you interact with referees and the opposing team. Teaching fair play helps develop strong character and a positive team culture. Additionally, playoff hockey can be highly emotional, coaches and players must learn how to regulate their emotions effectively. Whether it's handling frustration after a bad call, managing nerves in a close game, or staying composed after a mistake, emotional control is key to performance. Coaches should model calm behaviour and provide players with tools—such as deep breathing, visualization, and positive self-talk—to manage



pressure. A team that stays emotionally composed is more likely to make smart decisions and perform well in critical moments.

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

Playoffs are meant to be an exciting and memorable experience for all players. While some coaches may be tempted to shorten the bench in key moments, it's important to remember that every player has contributed throughout the season. Keeping everyone involved ensures that all players feel valued and motivated. Confidence in your entire roster leads to better team morale, and in the long run, a well-rested, engaged team is often more successful than one relying on just a few players.