



BENCH MANAGEMENT

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Being prepared for the upcoming game is part of the organiser role of a coach. Being able to organise a bench and manage it during the game is an important part of game day organisation.

Chapter Overview

- Practical and usable for all coaches
- Basics about running a bench
- Including layout, staff roles and changes

The time and effort spent on all areas of bench management will pay dividends in your performance and that of your team when the game begins.

Bench Layout

The layout of your bench and how it functions during the game is the most basic, but probably the most important, principle of bench management. A well organised bench makes working easier and helps increase communication.

Firstly the seating arrangement for players on the bench has to be addressed. Players need to know where to sit, how to enter and exit the bench, do they move down the bench towards the door or sit still. When all these questions situations are dealt with line changes can work like clockwork.

The simplest way is to have the players move in their lines, all 5 players together, down the bench towards the exit door. This is simple to understand and the players know when they should be on next.

Another bench setup, used by older teams, is to have the defensemen sitting at the end of the bench closest to their goal and the forwards sitting near the attacking goal. The advantage of this is it is a good way of ensuring your goal is protected on every line change made on the fly. This works very well on a bench that has two doors. You must remember that defence and forwards need to change bench positions before the start of each period.

Another question that needs to be answered is, who opens the doors? This is a good chance to use your staff, equipment man, trainer, even manager, or you can use the back up goalie, this will keep him actively involved in the game.

Consideration needs to be given to clearing litter off the bench before the game and keeping it clear during the game. This will stop players losing edges or getting paper on their blades. Think of the bench as your home.

Another consideration is where the spare sticks and water bottles are put during the game both have to be easily accessible but must be out of the way for the players and staff.

Finally how do you deal with benches that are not the unusual? Examples of this would be; only one door, no doors, one door in the middle of the bench, two benches - on behind the other, benches inside the blue lines, no benches, benches perpendicular to ice/boards, boards 18" wide, and sitting at the top of boards level.

These are other examples, there are others but it would be difficult to have an answer for all these special situations; however there are some basic principles to keep in mind that will help you cope with any situation:

- Decide the layout before the game make sure your team knows and understands it
- Ensure getting onto the ice is as simple as possible
- Make sure players are not getting in each others ways on line changes
- Make sure the staff can work and do their jobs
- Watch how the home team work their bench it may give you some ideas

Staff Roles

One of the most important area's of coaching is the division of labour among the coaching/management staff during the game.

The effective delegation of Authority is the mark of Leadership.

If the coach is fortunate enough to have other staff to help him, then it is very important to make sure that he utilises these people to their best potential and not try to do everything himself. The coach has to outline the responsibilities of assistant coaches, Manager, Assistant manager, Medic, equipment manager (trainer) during the game and be sure these roles are understood.

There are many ways that the coaching during a game can be divided between the coaches; one regularly used way is for one coach to organise the forwards and the other the defensemen including line changes. Another is for the Head Coach to run the whole bench and an assistant coach to deal with the tactical talks and adjustments between shifts.

If you have a Goalie coach he should watch and talk to the goalie. If you do not have a goalie coach another way of dealing with this situation is for the backup goalie to watch and review with the goalie.

All staff must know what, when and how information is to be exchanged this is especially important when the information is being feedback to the players. Confusing or contradictory messages will cause confusion on the bench.

Some of the staff can be used to do the doors on the bench as described in Bench Layout, but make sure this does not interfere with them doing their prescribed role.

Line Changes

The subject of line changes is closely related to that of bench layout especially the question of how players enter and exit the bench. This has been partially answered in Bench layout. Other areas to consider are:

- Enter the bench through the door, over the boards to the ice
- In one door out the other
- Forwards use one door defence use the other
- which door is which
- Do the doors change with the periods?

Another question is what order the players leave the bench if your team does a dump and change with 5 players coming to change. This really depends on your defensive strategy. If you force the team with the puck the order off then the bench should be first a forward to forecheck the puck carrier, second a defenseman who goes far side of the ice, in the neutral zone, to cut off stretch pass and then a forward to lock middle.

If your team defends the neutral zone, with no pressure on the puck, the defensemen should be first off the bench to defend your blueline, followed by the centre to close down the near blueline.

Shift length is another area to be considered. The generally accepted rule is between 35 seconds and a minute. This is the ideal shift length for players of all ages, as it gives the players a chance to work to the maximum of their capability and then time to recover. Unfortunately in youth hockey the thinking seems to be keeping your best players on the ice for as long as possible sometimes up to 5 minutes. With ice hockey being an anaerobic alactic sport this means the players aren't working as hard as they should.

The best time for your players to change is when your team has the puck and are attacking. This means your team will not be shorthanded while defending.

Another way is to dump the puck into the opponent's end of the ice and have all five players change at once. The puck has to be dumped into the corner on the same side as the team benches. This makes it easier for your players to get quickly onto the ice and defend against the on coming rush.

To stop confusion during line changes it is a good idea, especially on single player changes, to have the players coming to the bench to shout out their position, so the players on the bench know which player needs to be replaced.

Player Focus

The players focus while on the bench should be solely on the game. It is especially important to have the players seated all the time. Even at a young age a player should be encouraged to rest and watch the game. If they are too small to see over the boards then letting them stand by the boards is OK after they have rested and had a drink. The coach must ensure that the players are settled on the bench so they can concentrate on the game. He must also make sure that there are no outside distractions that could disrupt this concentration.

As the player gets older he will be able to concentrate more fully on what is happening on the ice and this will help his performance.

Any feedback the coach has for the players during a shift change needs to be simple, short and to the point, so it is easy to understand.

Coach Feedback

The basic communication principles are the foundation of good Coach feedback during the game. There are some general rules regarding the coaches behavior, if these are followed then information exchange on the bench should be clearer and more productive:

- Stay calm, controlled, be intense and focused but not too emotional
- Check your language, no swearing
- Provide feedback (be positive)
- Watch your body language
- Think before you speak
- Yelling at players does more harm than good
- Instructions yelled from the bench can break the players concentration and are usually not heard
- Hectic coach equals hectic team.
- Concentrate on doing your job not the referee's
- Arguing with players distracts you and entire team

Where the coach has to stand during the game determines the way he will deal with feedback on the bench. First the coach must be in a location where he can easily watch the game, so he can assess his teams play and analyse the opposition's strengths and weaknesses.

If he has to stand in front of the players he can make good eye-contact with his players but must ensure that he does not get in the way during line changes. When standing behind the bench the coach has to make sure he can see over his players so he can watch the game. Giving instructions to players should be done by leaning forward and talking quietly to them. If there is an important issue to be dealt with then have the player turn to face you so you can make eye-contact.

When giving instructions remember:

- Use cue words
- Be concise and to the point
- Don't over coach
- Players can only take in 3 key points
- Positive feedback