

SPRING TRYOUTS

Youth hockey tryouts in the US have traditionally taken place in the autumn. Over the past few years, however, there has been a gradual shift, and now more and more of them are being held in the spring. After much discussion with hockey coaches I came to the conclusion that teams started doing this in order to “lock in” the top players. This left the competing teams and organizations to scramble for quality players.

Although this trend started slowly and only in a few areas, it appears that this is now becoming the modus operandi for hockey tryouts around the country. Many coaches, now having their teams picked for the fall, continue heavy practice sessions throughout the spring and summer. Teams sometimes travel around the country to compete in tournaments throughout the summer to get even more competitive.

It’s understandable that coaches want to build the strongest teams possible, but what does this new trend mean to the kids? Here’s what I think and what I see happening as a result of spring tryouts:

Players who make a team in the spring may not have time to work on skill development in the off season if they have a hectic summer schedule, nor the incentive to work on skill development if they are assured a spot on their team.

Players who don’t make a team in the spring may not have the incentive to work on skill development in the off season because they didn’t make a team.

Players who do work on skill development over the summer and who improve dramatically may not have an opportunity to show their newly acquired skills because they’re not on a team.

Players who might be overlooked in the spring might improve greatly over the summer, but what are their chances of getting on a team if teams are already picked?

Players who might be overlooked in the spring because of size may grow significantly over the summer.

What happens to these players?

PLUS - Burnout! If developing athletes don’t periodically get away from daily regimens there may come a time when they just want to walk away. This can happen right at the time when they’re ready to peak.

Summer should be the time when kids work on *skill development!* Plus, they need to get outside, to play many sports, to have fun, to develop *multiple coordination skills*. Instead of playing hockey competitively they could enroll in one or two good skill development programs and then go to a fun hockey school that offers other sports in addition to hockey.

This year’s hockey All - Star game exemplifies the need for an emphasis on skill development in North American hockey. The Europeans demonstrated their impeccable skills and dominated as a result. It was a living example of what US and Canadian hockey experts have been saying for years; that most of the skilled players are coming from Europe; that North America is producing too many grinders.

For all the above reasons I believe that going back to the “old way” - fall tryouts - would be a boost for young hockey players and for the overall quality of US hockey. As coaches come to appreciate the long - term benefits this could come to pass.

Skate Explosive Hockey,

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