

Pre-Game Is Time To PrePare

(Originally submitted as an article by Greg Siller for Roller Hockey Magazine)

Preparing to play each game is one area that you may never have given much forethought to. In many cases, young players think of pre-game warm-ups as just time to kill before the real game gets started. It is essential, however, that coaches and players wisely use the time before a game to get physically *and mentally* prepared to play.

Since each team generally has only a few minutes to warm-up before each game, what can you do to get prepared? A better question is, what skills should your team (and its individual players) practice to get prepared for each game? ***The 6 essentials of pre-game warm-ups include stretching, skating, passing, shooting, positional warm-ups, and final feedback.***

Stretch for Your Best

Stretching may seem boring and unnecessary to some players and coaches, but it is an essential ingredient for maximizing your success. Stretching helps you move as efficiently and maximally as possible, and also aids in injury prevention. It is best to have players perform most of their stretching before they get onto the playing surface. This serves two purposes, it allows the limited *on-rink* warm-up time to be spent on specific hockey skills and it can also help direct any pre-game nervousness while the players are preparing in the locker room.

Skate, Pass, and Shoot

Once on the playing surface, players should take a couple of moderately-paced laps in each direction to get their legs warmed up and heart pumping. Skating warm-ups should include some starting, turning, stopping, and transitions (forward-to-backward) so that players get used to the playing surface. Goaltenders need to make sure that they can skate freely around their crease-area and also make sure that their equipment is adjusted properly.

There are several ways in which you can work the skating/passing/shooting warm-ups. The most basic is the Two Line Drill. This warm-up is performed by lining your players up into two lines near the center red line and having them execute 1-on-0's and 2-on-0's against the goaltender (don't have the players deke the goaltender—just shoot at this point). This drill is good because it allows the players to coordinate their skating, stickhandling, passing, and shooting. This warm-up is also good for goaltenders because it allows them to work on their crease movement, positioning, timing, and rebounds.

If your team is using two goaltenders, alternate them during the warm-up, if you can. If you don't get much warm-up time, keep your starting goaltender in the main warm-up drills and have one player shoot on your backup goaltender in one of the corners or along the boards near the center of the rink.

Greg Siller, founder of Pro Learning Systems (www.ProLearning.com), has put his 25 years of ice and roller hockey experience into authoring several hockey articles as well as two highly acclaimed hockey books; ***The Hockey Practice Playbook*** and ***Roller Hockey: Skills and Strategies for Winning On Wheels***.

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Positional Warm-ups

The best overall warm-up drills utilize game-like situations to prepare the players physical, mental, and communication skills in a competitive environment. Typically, coaches focus on only the physical and mental elements during warm-ups. However, the third element, communication skill, is also important as it allows the players to operate more cohesively; as a unit and as a team.

A good drill for positional warm-ups is the 2-on-1. This drill is quick, competitive, fun, and enables players to read, react, and communicate at a game-like pace.

This warm-up drill is;

- Quick - Each shift should take no more than 10 seconds to complete the cycle so your team should get plenty of *effective* warm-up time.
- Competitive – The drill focuses on the offensive unit versus the defensive unit (more on this below) and the outcome is a goal or no-goal.
- Fun – Every 10 seconds a new unit has the opportunity to win or lose the battle. This keeps the energy level up, brings out creativity, and gets the adrenaline levels ready for the game.
- Reading, reacting, and communication – What is great about this warm-up is that it enables all of the individual skills (skating, stickhandling, passing, and shooting) as well as many of the positional skills (defense, forward, goaltender skills) during this prelude. It also allows the offensive and defensive units to communicate to improve the organized outcome of the drill.

The 2-on-1 drill should not be seen as utilizing 3 players, but 4; the forward pair and the defense/goaltender pair. This is important as it is a reminder that the defensive player AND the goaltender each share responsibility for coverage of the two attacking forwards; the goaltender has primary responsibility for the shooter and the defensive player has primary responsibility for the non-puck carrying forward (especially a pass to that forward) and player containment when a rebound occurs.

Bringing It All Together With Final Feedback

Effective communication is essential during the pre-game phase. Beginning it with some instruction and ending it with some feedback and overall thoughts about your players and their opponents can do wonders to bring your team toward their peak. Following the pre-game warm-up drills, the players should be physically ready to play. The coach (and players) needs to make sure that they are also mentally ready to play. The coach should challenge the players with a couple of insightful comments that will help motivate them and help to focus their actions to play their best, both individually and as a team, for the entire game.

By utilizing your pre-game warm-up time wisely (incorporating the 6 pre-game essentials), your players will be *both physically and mentally* prepared to play their best game before the referee drops the first puck!

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