

WHAT IS TEAMWORK?

The dictionary defines teamwork as a number of persons acting in close association as members of a unit. This describes the sport of hockey — ice and in-line — perfectly. Many sports can be dominated by individuals, but hockey requires a team. Even the very best players need support and help from their teammates. The best players must also be able to fit within the team framework if they and their team expect to be successful.

Together
Everyone
Achieves
More

WHAT WILL TEAMWORK TEACH ME?

Teamwork helps you develop characteristics that will make you successful both on and off the playing surface. You learn to:

- care about others
- work with others
- adapt to difficult situations
- be unselfish
- be responsible and dependable
- develop self-discipline

HOW DO I BECOME A GOOD TEAM PLAYER?

It's not easy to learn how to be a good teammate and many times it takes years to get the message. After reading this, you will have a better understanding of how successful hockey players view teamwork.

Every team has a variety of players with different abilities. It is up to the coach to determine a player's strengths and weaknesses and use them in the best manner that assures the team will be successful. As a player, you must accept the role the coach has given you. Not everyone can be the leading scorer or the best defenseman. Know what the coach expects from you and then go out and do it. It takes everyone doing their job for the team to be successful.

Sometimes players are unhappy with their role and become jealous of teammates. Don't fall into that trap. You must always hope your team does well. Unhappy players can be a distraction and distractions usually spread, resulting in an unhappy, losing team. Occasionally, parents will get into the act by telling their child they should be on the power play or playing on a line with different players. Parents can be jealous of other players, too. If you want a different role, work hard in practice to improve your skills and the coach will use you differently. But remember, coaches are more likely to cut players who won't accept their role or be a team player. There has never been a successful team without unselfish role players.

When the U.S. Olympic Women's Ice Hockey Team won the gold medal in 1998 and the U.S. Men's Team won the World Cup of Hockey in 1996, they had great players who were all used to playing on the power play and being the best on their team. But they won because they were willing to play the role the coach asked of them. They played as a team and they played for each other. Those are great examples of teamwork.

WHAT OTHER THINGS DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT TEAMWORK?

Hockey is a game of mistakes. Don't get down on your teammates when they make a mistake. Instead, let them know you're still behind them. When you make a mistake, admit it. Your teammates will respect you for it and you will be less likely to repeat the mistake. Don't try to rationalize your play by blaming others. It's important to understand that you win as a team and lose as a team. Always stand up for each other. Most successful people are givers, and they are also happy people.

Team goals are more important than individual goals. Are you happy when you played well but the team did poorly? That's not the mark of a good teammate because it's selfish. Teamwork requires unselfishness. If you are the star player, you shouldn't expect to be treated differently than the other players. You have to play within the team

framework and be team-oriented if you want your teammates to look to you as a leader. Remember — there is no "I" in TEAM.

Teamwork means you have discipline. Lots of players will take bad penalties that hurt their team. Players who want to win won't hurt their team in this way. They put the team ahead of themselves. When you are in the penalty box, take a look at the game and see the tough situation you have put your teammates in.

Good teammates are disciplined away from the game, too. They live right and are good people. They don't do anything that would embarrass their teammates, coaches or parents. If the team is traveling, they show good manners in hotels and restaurants. People are complimenting them, not shunning them.

Teamwork comes down to attitude. The biggest skill you have is not passing, skating or shooting, but how you use your head and heart. You should play because you love to compete. Working hard as a team to accomplish the unthinkable is the best feeling in the world. When you are really a team that works together and cares about each other, you know a special feeling that is unique to team sports. After your biggest win, you can just look at your teammates, smile and appreciate what a wonderful feeling it is. No words need to be spoken. This is why when professional players retire, the thing they say they miss the most is their relationships with their teammates. Team play is about giving and sharing.



Tom Kimmel

HOW ABOUT THE COACH?

The coach has the ultimate responsibility to mold his or her players into a team. It oftentimes can be very difficult, but to be successful you must help your players understand the concept of teamwork.

Most players want to be the best player on the team. A coach's job is to help players become not the best on the team, but the best they can be. Treat players with respect, listen to their input and remember that you can learn from them as well. This is essential if you are to know your players and help them bond as a team. If they believe that you listen to them, they will respect your decisions and follow your lead.

Explain to each player his or her role. You can't expect a player to perform as you would like if you don't convey your expectations. Communication is extremely important to create a team atmosphere. You must care more about your players than your own personal goals and realize that you can have a huge influence on the players and their lives.

Other things to remember:

- Accept that players will make mistakes. Any mistake that is made when a player is trying his/her hardest should be tolerated. Don't dwell on negatives – remember that positive reinforcement creates confidence.
- If a coach loses his/her composure, so will the team. A good coach is one who can remain calm and pull the team together. You must create a belief amongst your team members that they will persevere and come out on top.
- Most coaches say they don't have favorite players, but as humans we know this isn't possible. While it is natural to admire and respect some athletes more than others, it is essential that you treat all your players fairly and with respect.
- Always be truthful with your players and yourself. Coaches make mistakes too! Admit mistakes just as you would expect your players to.

HOW CAN COACHES BUILD SELF-ESTEEM AND TEAMWORK?

- Videotape a few practices and games early in the season and then again at the end of the year. Use this to show your players how they've improved both as players and as a team. You can also take a look at yourself and see if you've done a good job.
- Engage your players in team-building activities. Whether you throw a pizza party or organize formal team-building exercises, it is important to remember that the coach is primarily responsible for developing the camaraderie that all great teams possess. When the game is on the line, success many times is determined by the team that has the most confidence in each other.

“Teamwork is more than collective play. It is the embodiment of selfless teammates in the pursuit of excellence.”

– Lou Vairo,
2002 U.S. Olympic Team Assistant Coach
(silver medal)

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