

## **Choosing an Off Season Conditioning Experience**

Playoff hockey is full on in the NHL and CHL and for some minor league players their competitive season is finished. As devout hockey fans Canadians love the drive for cup and many minor hockey players and their parents dream of future championship wins and great team success. Parents and players recognize that investing in off season conditioning can provide a competitive edge leading into fall try-outs. How do you choose a positive hockey conditioning experience for a young hockey player?

With the popularity of sport conditioning these days, there are many places parents can access "hockey conditioning" so to ensure the best results, programs should be carefully evaluated. Program cost and frequency are important considerations, but pay close attention to who is coaching (credentials, references, previous success) along with what hockey specific attributes the program develops (fast feet, core conditioning, strength, balance, agility) to fully understand your investment. Recognize that sport conditioning is not the same as generic fitness provided at your local fitness club. Only educated sport conditioning coaches truly develop hockey specific physical traits that support playing at the next level.

Hockey skills like skating, shooting, bodychecking and one-on-one maneuvers all require a specific set of athletic abilities and physical tools. Without a program to develop the physical attributes hockey skills, strategies and tactics draw upon, every player will eventually hit a ceiling of ability. Summer by summer, players who strive to improve can transform their game.

What is the best way to get there? Remember there are no universal rules, but there are some things for you to keep in mind when choosing the best option for a son or daughter. Spring hockey can be a very good caliber, providing a good on-ice experience. Game time is invaluable to refine hockey pace and tempo, positioning, play off the puck, vision, patience, decision making and other variables which help develop "hockey sense". Too much time on the ice, year-round, can lead to mental and emotional burnout, overuse skating injuries, and a bad habit of rehearsing the same weaknesses.

The general trend for all sports is early specialization. But this limits development as an *athlete* - and the best athletes are the ones who rise to the top. I highly recommend players participate in varied sports like lacrosse and soccer that help

develop youngsters as athletes, producing a smart and skillful body capable of much more than repeating skating and shooting movement patterns.

I prefer to split the off-season to first build whole body strength, muscle growth, aerobic conditioning, body control, flexibility, core strength, single leg balance and deceleration training. Week by week, at precisely the right time, we introduce higher speed lifts, rotary power, foot quickness drills, plyometrics, speed and agility training, anaerobic sprint intervals, acceleration and multi directional reaction drills combined with similar development on the ice to create the best possible results.

This approach ensures that players bring a new body, new physical skills and fresh enthusiasm to their fall hockey. I wish all players nothing but success as they strive to reach a new level of competitiveness.

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