



## Moving Up

Brian made the pee wee B1 team as a first year pee wee after having an outstanding two years in squirts. He was thrilled to make the second best pee wee team in the association until the third week of the season when reality set in. In squirts Brian was faster than most of the other players and he scored goals in nearly every game. In pee wees initially he was a step slow and having trouble scoring. As the team won their 4th game of the season Brian was in tears because he had not scored any of the goals and he was afraid that his father would be so upset with him that the “long ride home” would be tough to take, again.

This true story illustrates a couple of points that parents and coaches all need to remember with first year players at any level. Nearly all players need time to adjust as they move to the next level of play and parents can place undue and undeserved pressure on their kids to perform.

Moving to a higher level, be it pee wees to bantams ,bantams to high school or high school to juniors/college, requires players to adapt to the increased speed of the game and the increased physical aspects at the new level. Every level of the game is faster and quicker than the level below. As players move through the levels the talent level narrows on teams to a point where all of the players are fast and skilled. It takes time to adjust to the quicker pace and they need to make decisions faster and act sooner. It takes time to adjust.

In the youth ranks and for players moving to high school hockey, first year players could take a couple months before they fully adjust to the new level. Boston Bruin rookie, Blake Wheeler, took about 12 weeks to adjust when he moved from pee wees to bantams, and similarly he needed time to adjust to each new level thereafter. The bigger the level of change the more time needed to adjust. Players leaving bantams to move into high school typically would move to JV as they acclimate to the high school game. With fewer players available to many high school coaches in smaller programs, 10<sup>th</sup> grade players are often moved right to varsity level and expected to perform immediately which is an unfair expectation. Coaches and parents need to allow time for the younger players to develop and adjust to the faster game at the higher level.

Brian’s story has a happy ending. I visited with his father, who had not played hockey, and explained the current situation. His father was shocked. He had not understood that

his son need time to adjust to the faster pace and bigger kids. Furthermore he was stunned by the pressure he had unfairly put onto son's shoulders. To learn that Brian was scared of getting into the car with him after the game brought tears to his eyes. Brian's dad promised to let the coaches' coach and to support Brian in a positive way from that day forward. He kept his word and Brian had a great season once he adjusted to the new level of play.

As players move to the next level parents and coaches need to have patience and allow the time required to adapt to the new level. Putting pressure on kids to soon is a coaching and parenting failure not a failure by the players. When I coached bantams I would tell the first year boys that I would let them know when they were "officially bantams" and in the meantime play hard and have fun as they adjust. For most boys it took until mid-season before they had made the adjustments. The same is true at all other levels.

As you watch your son or daughter move to a new level remember the story of Brian and his Dad. Be supportive and positive while your child learns new skills, adjusts to the faster pace and enjoys playing the great game of hockey.

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