

You Don't Have To
Play At The NTDP To
Take Responsibility
For Your Own
Development



IT'S IN YOUR HANDS

By Lisa
Vollmers



SA Hockey Arena is a destination. Not only is it the home to the National Team Development Program, Compuware Youth Hockey, and numerous tournaments, it is a building that showcases the history, events, influential teams and people that shaped our national organization.

As one moves through the arena, they will see various team photos, player posters and displays. They will also read numerous inspirational quotes and phrases. The one that is repeated in several areas as a reminder to all:

Take Responsibility for Your Development.

This motto is emphasized for our players in every aspect of the NTDP. Experts in sports science and highly experienced coaches provide our athletes with a strong foundation upon which the players can build.

According to Head Coach Dan Muse, "We create an environment where players learn to prepare and work to be the best version of themselves when nobody is watching."

Having players taking responsibility for their own development is not just so that they can have success while they are here, Muse says. It also gives them the tools to be working towards



PLAYERS AT THE NATIONAL TEAM DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM HAVE CONSTANT REMINDERS OF WHAT IT TAKES TO BE SUCCESSFUL, IN HOCKEY AND IN LIFE.

their full potential long after they leave Plymouth, Mich. By the end of the two years, they know how to prepare, how to stay focused, how to manage their time and eliminate distractions. They know how to have purpose to their training without someone standing over them.

RESPONSIBILITY IN THE CLASSROOM

In the classroom, we also strive for excellence and provide the student-athletes with the tools to achieve their academic goals. The students receive time in the daily schedule, space and support to fulfill their graduation and NCAA requirements. They are guided to take classes that challenge them academically and support their professional endeavors.

All of this is done to best prepare them for next steps; studying at the university level, playing college hockey and the ultimate goal of playing in the NHL. The key however, is that the student-athletes must recognize what is provided and take personal responsibility to develop the skills necessary for success.

“I believe student-athletes should strive for excellence in everything that they do. How you do anything is how you do everything,” Muse says. “The game of hockey can provide some amazing life lessons in regards to responsibility and the daily pursuit of greatness. As a coach, I hope that the student-athletes can take those lessons and apply them to their work in the classroom.”

At the National Team Development Program, we are fortunate to work with high school juniors and seniors that have long been working on life skills to facilitate the process. Their parents, previous coaches, teachers, and mentors have provided guidance in their journey toward success and we are dedicated to enhance those skills.

For any child, having a level of responsibility is healthy. Basic chores that are required will help them grow into more responsible young adults. Parents, don’t hesitate to require your children to make their bed, keep their room tidy, put away their toys, read, eat healthy and drink lots of water. In addition, help them engage with others and keep a positive attitude. If you start early with these base-level skills, you have provided your children with an excellent foundation of life skills upon which they can build.

When a young person begins to play organized hockey (or any sport), parents need to keep them involved



in the process. Explain to them the necessity of being on time for every practice and game, and to be ready to participate. Have your player help to pack (and unpack) the equipment bag. Impress upon them what they need to have to be prepared and why. As they get older, put the onus upon them and hold them accountable. Later in life, they will appreciate knowing expectations and how to fulfill them.

PUT YOUR BEST SKATE FORWARD

As players join their first team and subsequently participate with new teams, it is important to “Put their best skate forward.”

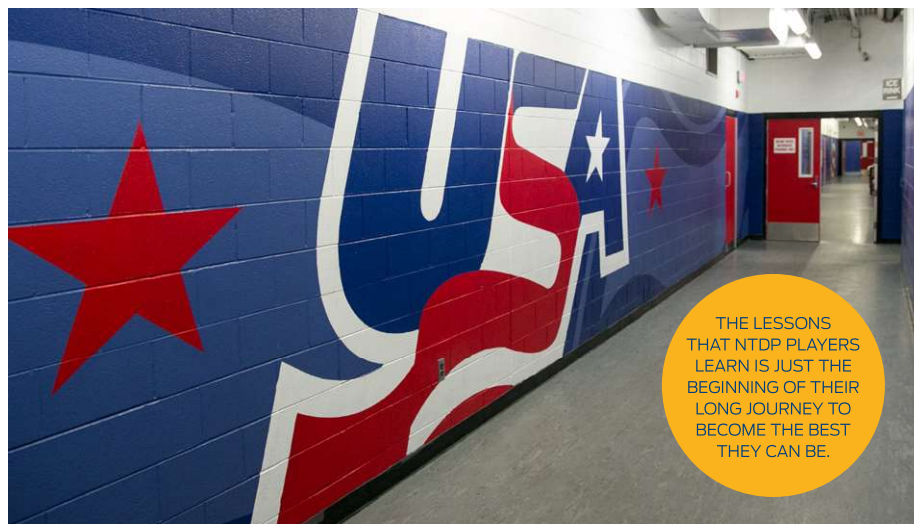
Hockey mom and host parent Karen Springer stresses that “attitudes are contagious. If you exude positive energy, it’s going to go a long way in making that team a fun one to be a part of.”

She recommends that parents emphasize the importance of their child to stepping out of their comfort zone and introducing themselves to the other players at the very first practice as the best team experiences involve kids supporting, knowing and lifting each other up, instead of tearing one another down.

She extends that advice to parents as well. Whether you’re new to a team or it’s your fifth season, be sure to introduce yourselves to the other families as everyone is going to spend a great deal of time together during the season. A positive attitude and engaging with others are the responsibility of everyone on the team, both parents and players.

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—NTDP BILLET MOM KAREN SPRINGER



THE LESSONS THAT NTDP PLAYERS LEARN IS JUST THE BEGINNING OF THEIR LONG JOURNEY TO BECOME THE BEST THEY CAN BE.

TALK ISN'T CHEAP

Another key skill to bring to each new season no matter the player's age is communication. I work with 46 student-athletes each day, and it is essential that they let me know if they are struggling with academics or in their billet home, if they need tutorial support, or if there is an issue with their own family that may be across the country. I repeat to the kids, "I only know what I know" thus it is essential that they openly and honestly communicate with me.

Communication is imperative with the coaches. Players must learn how to speak with their coaches, know how to ask questions, request help and, most importantly, be honest in those conversations.

Parents also need to communicate. Don't be afraid to ask questions or share information about your child; just keep in mind the most appropriate time and place. I highly recommend that one never approaches a coach immediately following a game, win or lose, and waits 24 hours.

Springer encourages her two sons to effectively communicate with their teachers at school. She puts the responsibility of speaking to teachers on the boys. At the start of the school year, the boys must share with their teachers that they participate in travel sports outside of the school and that will require them to miss a few days when they travel for tournaments. The Springers put the responsibility on their children to work out a plan for missed educational instruction time.

She adds, "It goes without saying in our home that if their grades begin to suffer, then hockey gets put on hold."

No doubt, grades and academic achievement are important for student-athlete devel-

opment. As a host mom for the National Team Development Program, she emphasizes that for players in the billet system, communication is imperative. If players, parents and host parents don't communicate, the relationship can quickly derail. Without question, the ability to effectively communicate is a key skill in every player's development.

Work hard, have fun and be a good teammate."

—KEVIN REITER, NTDP DIRECTOR OF PLAYER PERSONNEL

YOU ARE WHAT YOU EAT

Another area in which all players must be held accountable for their development relates to overall health and nutrition. For the younger players, we encourage parents to teach their children about healthy, well-rounded snacks and meals. No matter the age, fruits and vegetables, dairy, protein and healthy carbohydrates are important. Once they learn to love the good food, they will learn to ditch the bad food. In addition, teaching

the importance of hydration will go a long way.

I realize that there's a lot to take in here. That's why it's important to start small and add new tasks as your child grows and develops through the process. Parents should learn to guide and not take over. Helping your child grow into a kind and responsible teammate is the end goal.

To keep it simple, it may be easy to follow the advice of NTDP Director of Player Personnel Kevin Reiter, "Work hard, have fun and be a good teammate."

If your player focuses on those three traits, the groundwork has been set for a lifetime of success. ☆

Lisa Vollmers is the director of student-athlete services at USA Hockey's National Team Development Program.