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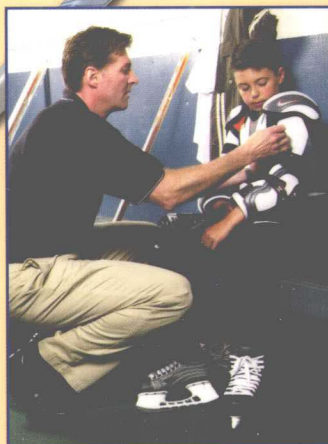
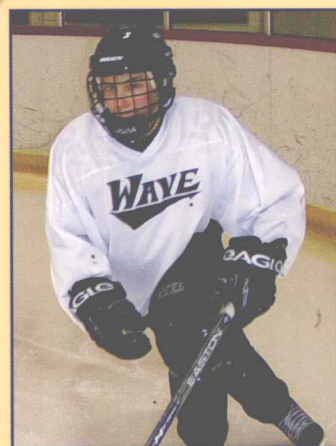
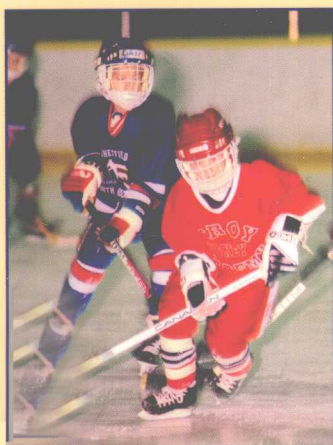
THE

B A F F L E D P A R E N T ' S

G U I D E T O

COACHING YOUTH

HOCKEY



Bruce Driver  
Stanley Cup Champion  
with Clare Wharton

THE BAFFLED PARENT'S  
GUIDE TO  
COACHING YOUTH  
HOCKEY

Bruce Driver

Stanley Cup Champion

*with Clare Wharton*



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*To the two hockey parents who brought me into this world and also taught me everything they know about the sport—thanks, Mom and Dad! Gary, thank you for being the role model who drove my passion to play. Clare, thank you for your vision and including me in your plan to write this book. I'd especially like to thank Tracy, my wife of twenty years, who put up with me during my fifteen-year NHL career and still supports my desire to coach today. Lastly, to our two children, Whitney and Dillon, thank you for letting me be a coach—and not Dad—when we are on the ice!*

BRUCE DRIVER

*To my husband, Larry, and my children, Carrie and Todd,  
for their unwavering support, love, and encouragement.*

CLARE WHARTON

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**THE BAFFLED PARENT'S GUIDE TO**  
COACHING YOUTH  
**HOCKEY**

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## Preface: In Canada, Every Kid Plays Hockey

I grew up in Toronto, Canada, where basically everybody plays hockey. All the neighborhood kids gravitated to my parents' double driveway because of its size. We spent every day stickhandling with tennis balls, shooting on anyone willing to play goalie, and skating, always skating. I remember the park down the street from my house, where each winter the town would erect a skating rink. My father and neighbor filled the rink with a fire hose and tended to it with shovels, and off we went. From the time I was three, almost every free minute was spent skating. When I started school, I couldn't wait to race home, complete my homework (or sometimes not), and head for the rink at that park. I always looked forward to weekends because I could skate all day, or at least until my parents called me in for lunch and supper.

All my friends played for one reason: they loved the game. Of course, we all had dreams as well. When we scored, we envisioned that the next puck we got in the net was the winning goal of the seventh game of the Stanley Cup finals. But our motivation for playing was simply to have fun. My father coached hockey and taught me things that I carried into my days in the National Hockey League. My parents provided incredible support for both me and my older brother who also played hockey. Their support never included pressure; I know I wouldn't have lasted as long as I did had I felt pushed to play. Because I loved the game, I joined my first team when I was four and continued to play in Toronto until I was eighteen. The minor hockey system in Toronto is the largest and probably the best known in the world. I was fortunate to be a part of the Toronto Marlies AA teams when we won an amazing four city championships in a row. I then played for the Wexford Raiders, a Bantam A team, for two years, but I really wasn't certain how long I was going to continue playing. I was drafted by the Oshawa Generals, a Major Junior A team, but left near the end of training camp for a Tier 2 Junior A team back in Toronto.

My good fortune continued when I was accepted at the University of Wisconsin, playing my first two years for one of the best coaches in the country, "Badger Bob" Johnson. Bob took a coaching job with the Calgary Flames before I began my junior year, but our new coach, Jeff Sauer, continued Bob's winning tradition. My team won two national championships and one second place in the three years I played for Wisconsin. I considered it a joy to play the sport I loved and receive an excellent education at the same time.

In hockey, as in life, you never know where the next opportunity will present itself. After completing my junior year at college, I was asked to try out for Team Canada for the Sarajevo Olympics of 1984. Our first training

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camp took place in June of 1983, the beginning of a whirlwind tour of games that stretched all across the globe to such places as Sweden, the USSR, Germany, and Austria. In fact, even though the tryout team was based in Calgary, only five games of the fifty-five we played that year were home games. Although I still regard those months as the longest hockey tryouts I've ever faced, playing hockey around the world was nothing short of amazing. Actually, I did not find out until the middle of January that I had made the Olympic team. My excitement only doubled when I got to the Olympic Village, meeting other young athletes from every sport and attending Olympic events. Team Canada made it to the bronze medal game, and as disappointing as it was to lose that game, we proved we were a young group of Canadian kids who played better than everyone expected.

Once again, I found myself faced with a decision. I could return home and wait until the fall to begin my senior year at college, or I could accept an invitation from the New Jersey Devils to try out for the team. I accepted the invitation, playing only four games with the team before we were eliminated from the playoff race. Again, disappointment brought opportunity. I was then sent to play for their farm team, the Maine Mariners, who were fighting for a playoff spot when I arrived. We not only managed to make the playoffs, but we went on to win the championship and the coveted Calder Cup. The Calder Cup win capped the longest year of my playing career, spanning from June 1983 to May 1984. The following year, I was called to the Devils' training camp and won a spot on the team, the beginning of a fifteen-year career in the National Hockey League.

Throughout my NHL career, I always tried to learn from the lessons of success and disappointment. 1988 was the first year the Devils made it into the play-offs by winning the last regular season game in overtime. But the Cinderella play-off run ended when we lost game seven to the Boston Bruins in the semifinals. When we failed to make the play-offs the following year, I realized that success never comes easily and can never be taken for granted. In the next few years, we were bounced from the first round of the play-offs, but our determination grew. Losing an emotional seven-game series in 1994 to the New York Rangers, our cross-river rivals, actually helped us the following year. We won the Stanley Cup in 1995 because of our renewed focus and determination that was born from the previous year's defeat.

When I retired from professional hockey after concluding my career with the New York Rangers in 1998, I realized that along with a natural ability to play hockey, luck had helped station me at the right place at the right time. I now play recreational hockey with new friends but have switched positions from defenseman to goalie. I coach youth hockey as well and thoroughly enjoy it. By coaching children, I get to teach them the skills, but equally as important, I pass along what I learned growing up in Toronto: always play for fun.

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## **From Player to Coach**

I began coaching youth hockey because both my son and daughter wanted to get on the ice. Playing hockey was their idea, not mine. Because I was fortunate enough to have been taught by so many talented coaches during my career, I could incorporate their valuable lessons into my own style of instruction. Right now, I'm involved in coaching at Pee Wee, high school girls' varsity, and Junior A levels. I emphasize skill development rather than team strategies with the younger players. Kids should be taught how to play the game properly so they can progress to the next level. The emphasis should be on fun and learning, not winning games. I've found it's best to wait until the Bantam, Midget, and high school levels to introduce a lot of advanced team concepts and hockey strategies.

One of the things that sets hockey apart from other sports is how much money parents must spend on equipment and ice time. But there are many skills that can be developed away from the rink, which coaches tend to overlook. Encourage kids to stickhandle tennis or street hockey balls around inverted pails or shoot pucks against boards. Be creative and have fun.

## **Collaboration**

Clare Wharton is a former high school English teacher turned freelance journalist who has worked as a reporter and feature writer for various New Jersey newspapers and parenting publications. After earning a master's degree as a Reading Specialist, she worked as an English tutor in an adolescent crisis unit. She became interested in hockey when her son began playing at the age of seven. After ten years as a full-fledged "hockey mom," Clare developed a growing enthusiasm for hockey by watching and attending New Jersey Devils' games.

Remaining in contact with her friends from the world of youth hockey, Clare learned that the extremely talented defenseman she had watched throughout his NHL career had become a much-admired youth hockey coach. When the opportunity arose for her to write about the sport she had grown to love, Bruce Driver was her first choice.



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# Introduction: Welcome Aboard, Coach

So, you're a Baffled Parent. The last thing you clearly remember was your son or daughter asking to play youth hockey. It sounded like a great idea. Perhaps you played hockey yourself or simply enjoy watching the game. Or maybe you don't even know the difference between offsides and icing. It didn't much matter until you suddenly found yourself selected to coach your child's team. Now what?

This book is for you.

Everything written here will guide you to become a successful coach. This book is geared for teaching six- to fourteen-year-old players the game of hockey. Not only will you learn hockey basics, but you'll learn how to teach them as well. You'll understand and be able to convey the true meaning of sportsmanship and teamwork. And best of all, you'll learn to relax, have fun, and enjoy the many rewards of coaching.

Every child learns in a different way and brings a different level of athletic ability to the rink. I'll show you how to challenge your players so each child can progress to the next level of play. I'll explain how to encourage even the shyest child and use the energy of the most enthusiastic. You'll discover ways to approach mixed as well as single-gender teams. Whatever team or level you're responsible for, you'll be able to instruct, encourage, and mold a team into one that will play well and have fun in the process.

## How to Use This Book

*Coaching Youth Hockey: The Baffled Parent's Guide* explains the skills required to play youth hockey, offering detailed drills, techniques, and suggestions for instruction. Though it's best to begin by reading the book in its entirety, you can refer to each chapter for advice on specific challenges. Part One provides all the nitty-gritty information you'll need to coach your team. Chapter 1, *Creating an Atmosphere of Good Habits*, will walk you through establishing yourself as coach. If you're not quite clear on the rules of the game, read Chapter 2, *Before Hitting the Ice: Hockey Clear and Simple*. If the thought of organizing an entire season is overwhelming, see Chapter 3, *Setting Up the Season*. If you're uncertain about the skills necessary to play hockey, refer to Chapter 4, *Essential Skills and How to Teach Them*. Worried about what to say to your new team and where to begin? Chapter 5, *Goaltending*, explains the special skills your goalie will need, and Chapter 6, *Offense and Defense*, focuses on offensive and defensive fundamentals. Chapters 7 and 8, *The Practice and Sample Practices*, will tell you how to organize and conduct your practices, providing a detailed time frame for the many drills that are included for teaching the principles. In Chapter 9, *The Game*, you'll learn how to have a stress-free first game and help your players

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have fun on the ice. Chapter 10, *Dealing with Parents and Gender Issues*, addresses problems that might arise with parents and challenges that different genders can create.

In Part Two, you'll find every drill necessary for the growth and happiness of your players and *your* peace of mind. Remember that no matter at what level you're coaching, the fundamental drills (Chapter 11) should be an integral part of every practice. Offensive and defensive drills (Chapters 12 and 13) are included; you determine how many of each type your team should work on at each practice. You'll notice that unlike many other sports, hockey requires that players transition quickly from offense to defense depending on what's happening on the ice. Therefore, Chapter 14, *Game Situation Drills*, provides the drills necessary for players to become versatile and proficient in every situation.

● *beginner*

●● *intermediate*

●●● *advanced*

Drills are assigned difficulty levels of “beginner,” “intermediate,” and “advanced.” Beginner drills are generally for six- to eight-year-olds; intermediate drills are for nine- to ten-year-olds who should have mastered most of the essential skills; advanced drills are for eleven- to fourteen-year-olds who already excel at skating, stickhandling, shooting, and checking. Keep in mind that kids learn the game and develop their motor skills at different ages. Use the drills that best address the needs of your team and your individual players, regardless of age group.

Some chapters conclude with a Question and Answer section to guide you through dealing with any perplexing situation that might arise during the season. If you're still having trouble mastering hockey terminology, use the information sidebars and glossary as your hockey dictionary. The section on referee signals will explain each call. If you're looking for additional insight about youth hockey organizations or online sites, check the Resources. And the detailed index will help you locate advice on specific problems. Use all the information provided to adapt to your own needs, questions, and unique style.

## **A Word on Coaching Style**

All the drills and techniques included in this book are ones that have worked best for me since I began coaching youth hockey. In other words, they best fit *my* style, but you may want to develop your own. Coaching styles can vary greatly, but one thing they should all emphasize is respect. First and foremost, teach your players to respect you, themselves, the other team, and the officials. Their win-loss record is much less important than the way they conduct themselves on and off the ice. In addition, your primary objective should be to bring each child to his or her best level of play through hard work and encouragement. When players look back at the time they spent playing hockey, they probably won't remember how many games their team won or lost during a particular season, but they will remember if they had fun doing so.

Kids love the competitive, fast-paced aspects of the game, so I incorporate mini-competitions during practices. I'll sometimes have the losing competitors do extra skating sprints or push-ups, but these are designed to heighten the level of competition rather than be seen as a punishment. Again, if you don't like the idea of intra-team competitions or if you feel it hurts rather than helps your players, feel free to eliminate them completely.

As coach, you're also your players' role model, so use your responsibility wisely. Kids are very eager to learn and just as eager to please. Make your expectations clear at the beginning of each season, practice, and game. Be patient because not all kids grasp new concepts and drills at the same time. Be quick to praise them for a good effort, be understanding when they fail, and be willing to give as much time as necessary to help each individual contribute. Working as a team provides as many lessons about life as it does about hockey. Children will learn the enormous satisfaction they can derive from helping one another, working together toward a common goal, and involving 100 percent of their effort and abilities. Your reward as coach will be in guiding them to these realizations.

There are five key points for being a good coach:

**Come prepared for the expected . . . and the unexpected.** Make certain you have a well-made plan for every game and practice. Select drills based upon the skills your team needs to learn, but include fundamentals at every session. Your practice plan should include the time allotment for each drill or activity. A backup plan is a must. You may have been promised a full-ice practice, only to learn you're sharing the ice with another team. You may find that someone else is using the extra cones and nets you were planning to use for a relay. Hope for the best, but plan for the monkey wrenches.

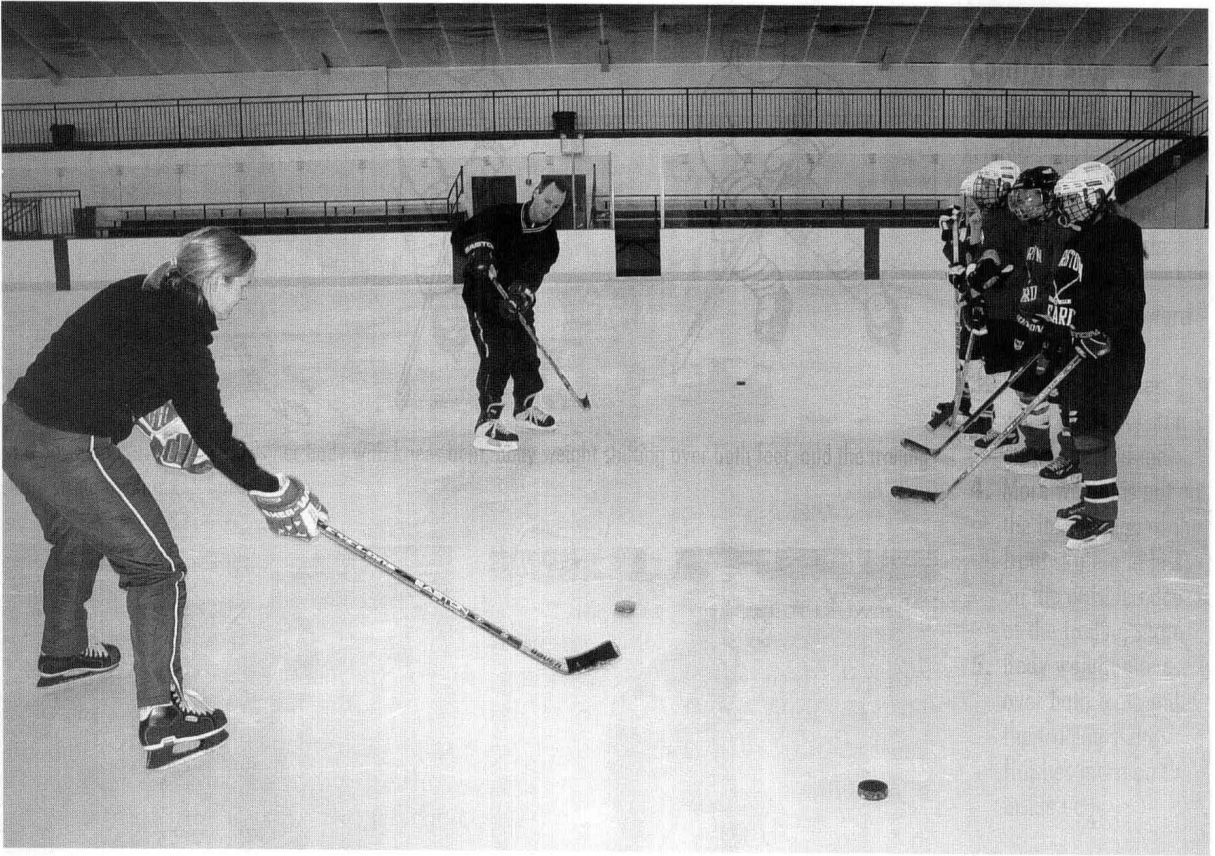
Remember to bring everything you'll need, such as your coaching board, whistle, water bottles, pucks, cones, first-aid kit, and handouts. Good organization on your part will help keep each child involved, interested, and clear about your expectations.

**Be adaptable.** Sometimes things that look good on paper just don't cut the ice. If you see your team is struggling with a particular drill, you may either have to modify it or substitute a completely new drill. You can easily judge when your kids are becoming bored; don't hesitate to insert a scrimmage or mini-competition to restore their enthusiasm.

**Kind words go a long way.** No one likes to be criticized or humiliated. Remember that kids are eager to learn and to please. As their coach, you're expected to instruct, correct, and challenge. However, you must be sensitive in your approach. Be generous in your praise when a child has mastered a particular skill; choose your words carefully when a player makes an error.

**Enthusiasm is contagious.** Show your players how pleased you are to be their coach. Your high energy level will ignite their passion to become better players and teammates. Remember that practices are just as important as games. You must convey that there's no place you'd rather be and no other group of kids with whom you'd like to share your knowledge.

**Get to know each player.** A good coach knows that a team is made up of individuals, each with his or her own unique personality. Through careful observation, you'll learn how best to raise the skill and personal confidence level of each child. One player may enjoy demonstrating a new drill for teammates. Another may be horrified at the thought. Your responsibility is to motivate players to feel good about one another's strengths as well as their own. Children can learn a great deal from each other as well as from you. As you guide them to interact positively, they will truly become a "team."





# Coaching 101: Everything You Need to Know about Coaching Youth Hockey

