



**Adapting to Professional Coaching:  
A Journey in Ice Hockey Leadership**

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## Abstract

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<p>This thesis investigates the adaptation to professional coaching in ice hockey, focusing on the development of coaching skills and leadership within a professional team environment. The study was conducted at Kokkolan Hermes, a professional ice hockey club, where the author served as an assistant coach. The primary objective was to enhance the author's coaching skills, build confidence in a new cultural and professional setting, and prepare for future career opportunities.</p> <p>The theoretical framework of the study was based on athlete-centered coaching principles and the importance of effective communication and positive body language in creating a supportive and motivating environment for players. The study utilized a diary-based approach, documenting weekly observations and reflections over a six-week period. The methodology included one-on-one interviews, peer learning strategies, video analysis, and structured drills to improve players' understanding and application of offensive zone principles.</p> <p>Key findings of the study highlighted the significance of self-reflection, adaptability, and effective communication in professional development. The author discovered the power of reflection in analysing decisions and behaviours, which provided clarity on how small changes could lead to significant growth. Adaptability was identified as crucial for overcoming challenges and remaining resilient in the face of change. Effective communication, both verbal and non-verbal, was found to be essential for building stronger relationships, fostering collaboration, and leading effectively in professional settings.</p> <p>The study concluded that the lessons learned during the internship, including the importance of positive body language, effective communication, and adaptability, will be instrumental in the author's future coaching career. The experience reinforced the value of self-awareness, continuous learning, and the ability to navigate challenges with confidence and optimism.</p>
<b>Keywords</b> Professional coaching, Ice-hockey leadership, Athlete-centered coaching, Communication skills, Self-reflection, Adaptability

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# 1 Introduction

I chose to pursue a work placement at Kokkolan Hermes because it offered a unique opportunity to dive into the world of coaching—a field where mentorship, strategy, and leadership come together to shape the future of the game. Hermes was particularly appealing as it allowed me to work alongside experienced professionals who could mentor and guide me through this journey. At the core of my decision lies a deep passion for ice hockey and a strong interest in understanding the complexities of coaching and player development.

My goal in joining the coaching staff at Kokkolan Hermes was not only to gain invaluable hands-on experience but also to deepen my understanding of the sport I love and explore the powerful impact that effective coaching has on players' lives. Starting this role as an intern marked a significant milestone in my coaching career. With over a decade of practical coaching experience across various age groups, I entered this position with a solid foundation of skills and theoretical knowledge. Currently in my final year of the Degree Programme in Sport and Leisure Management, my studies have prepared me to coach at all levels of hockey and boosted my confidence in professional English communication. However, this new role presented a fresh challenge, as I had not yet coached at this level or within a culturally different environment.

One of my strongest assets as a coach is my communication skills, which have been crucial for building trust and fostering an athlete-centered approach. This approach focuses on the needs, growth, and development of each player, making them active participants in their own progress. Throughout this journey, I have prioritized positive body language and constructive feedback to create a supportive atmosphere. Recognizing the importance of collaboration, I also implemented peer learning strategies to encourage team members to learn from one another. Adapting my communication style across various contexts became essential, enabling me to engage effectively with players, staff, and management.

During my time at Kokkolan Hermes, I learned a great deal about leading a team at a professional level. Positive body language played a significant role in this, as it helped to create a cohesive and motivated environment. By maintaining an open and approachable demeanour, I was able to foster a sense of trust and camaraderie among the players. This, in turn, enhanced their willingness to collaborate and support each other both on and off the ice.

Additionally, I focused on developing my leadership skills by observing and learning from the experienced coaches and management at Hermes. I participated in strategic planning sessions and contributed to the development of training programs. These experiences have strengthened my approach to coaching, helping me to bridge my past knowledge with the demands of a new, professional environment.

In summary, my work placement at Kokkolan Hermes has been a transformative experience. It has not only deepened my understanding of coaching and player development but also equipped me with the skills necessary to lead a team at a professional level. The emphasis on positive body language and effective communication has been instrumental in creating a supportive and motivating environment for the players. As I continue to grow in my coaching career, I am confident that the lessons learned during this internship will serve me well in future endeavours.

## **2 Description of the initial situation**

### **2.1 Analysis of your current work**

My role as an assistant coach is to participate in the team's ice training and to guide the head coach of the club's U20 team, to watch their training and games. At games, I also make live videos during a match. These tasks involve good communication skills with different people. Also, I need to find ways to express my own opinions when I have the chance.

I think I have good communication skills that I have developed over the past thirty years in ice hockey. I have been a player for more than 20 years and a coach for more than 10 years for players of various ages. In addition, the "normal" work life I have had for more than 15 years has helped me reflect on the kind of leadership I have seen there. It has given me ideas on how to interact with people and get along with them. University has also supported my own view of athlete-centered coaching which I believe is a big part of how we should coach today. Of course, we also must remember the level of demand that comes with practice, and by keeping it high, we bring out the best in the athletes. What comes to my journey as a coach I must be better at communicating with players and staff members. This is one of the crucial things in my professional career growth. Be able to put my thoughts into words. Also, it is never ending learning part of how game evolves in future, be on the edge of that. That is one thing also that I have been getting better and better at every day. Learning the game of hockey and how it can be played so many ways. At this point, I believe my skills are well-developed, especially when it comes to interacting effectively with athletes. I have a strong ability to work within a group setting, contributing as an effective team member. Additionally, I have a solid understanding of ice hockey, which I can approach from both the team's perspective and the individual player's needs. This balance allows me to support athletes effectively in both collective and personal growth areas. I consider myself a skilled performer with a thorough understanding of my responsibilities. I can approach my tasks with confidence and consistency, continuously meeting the demands and expectations set for my role. My depth of knowledge allows me not only to complete tasks effectively but also to adapt to new challenges within my work, ensuring that I maintain a high level of performance in all situations

### **2.2 Interest group at work**

During my internship at Kokkolan Hermes, several interest groups played a key role in shaping my experiences and influencing the outcomes of my work. These groups had direct or indirect involvement in my activities and significantly contributed to my personal and professional development. Below, I describe the key interest groups and their roles in this context.

## Kokkolan Hermes Organization

The Kokkolan Hermes organization was the primary interest group during my internship. As a professional ice hockey club, they provided the environment, resources, and structure necessary for me to engage in practical coaching. Their interest lies in maintaining high coaching standards, supporting team development, and ensuring the quality of their operations. The organization also benefited from my contributions, which were aligned with the team's objectives and operational goals.

## Coaching Staff

The coaching staff served as mentors and collaborators throughout my internship. Their role was to guide me, provide feedback on my methods, and integrate me into the team's coaching strategies. Their interest was twofold: ensuring that my work supported the team's performance and fostering my development as a professional coach. This collaboration allowed me to learn from experienced professionals and adapt to the expectations of a high-level coaching environment.

## Players

The players were a vital interest group as the primary recipients of my coaching. Interacting with them provided an opportunity to apply and refine my skills, such as effective communication, positive feedback, and athlete-centered coaching techniques. Their interest was focused on receiving quality coaching to enhance their performance and achieve personal and team goals. The trust and rapport I built with the players were crucial for the success of my internship.

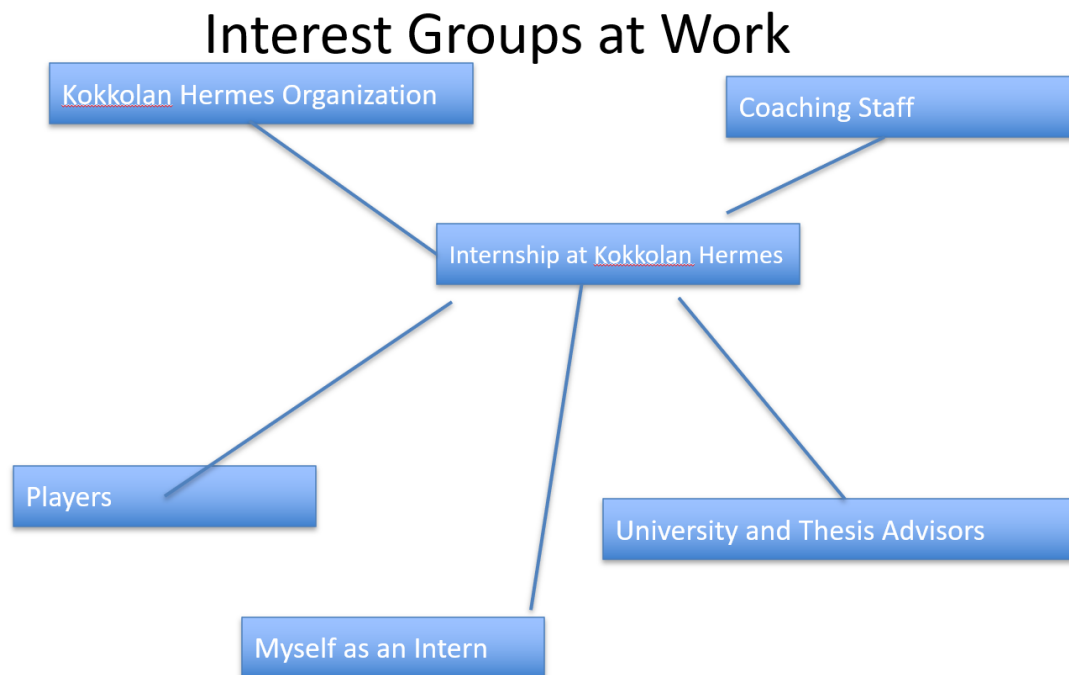
## University and Thesis Advisors

The university and my thesis advisors represented the academic interest group in this project. They provided the theoretical framework and reflective tools that guided my learning process. Their interest was centered on ensuring that my internship aligned with academic standards, contributed to my thesis work, and supported my growth as a student and professional. Their feedback and guidance were invaluable in helping me structure my reflections and connect theory with practice.

## Myself as an Intern

Finally, I was a central stakeholder in this process. My role was to actively engage in the learning experience, implement coaching strategies, and adapt to the professional environment. My primary interest was to enhance my coaching skills, build confidence in a new cultural and professional setting, and prepare for future career opportunities. Through self-reflection and openness to feedback, I was able to maximize the benefits of this internship.

The interactions between these interest groups created a dynamic and collaborative environment that significantly impacted my internship experience. The organization and coaching staff provided practical opportunities and mentorship, while the players allowed me to test and refine my methods. The university and thesis advisors ensured that my work was academically grounded, and my own commitment to growth tied these elements together. Together, these groups created a holistic learning experience that contributed to both my professional development and the successful completion of my thesis.



### 2.3 Interaction skills at work

Alright, let's talk about what it really takes to thrive as a coach in a club, focusing on the interaction skills that are key to making everything run smoothly.

First off, communication is everything. Whether I'm breaking down strategies in the locker room, giving feedback during practice, or dealing with the staff in organisation, how I communicate can make or break the situation. It's not just about what I say, but how I say it—tone, body language, eye contact—all that plays a huge role. If I'm clear and consistent, the team knows what's expected, and we avoid a lot of misunderstandings.

Then there's emotional intelligence, which, honestly, is a game-changer. We're all under pressure, whether it's from the game schedule, media expectations, or just the day-to-day grind. Being able to read the room, understand what the players are feeling, and know how to respond is crucial.

If someone's having an off day, I need to pick up on that and adjust how I approach them. It's about creating an environment where everyone feels supported and motivated. Now, let's face it—conflicts are going to happen. Whether it's between players, or maybe even between me and the management, conflicts are part of the game. My job is to address these issues head-on, find out what's really going on, and work out a solution that keeps us moving forward. The quicker and more effectively I can resolve conflicts, the less it impacts our performance as a team.

Adaptability is another big one. Every day is different. One day I'm dealing with the media, the next I'm managing a tough conversation with a player who's not getting as much ice time as they'd like. Each situation demands a different approach. Being flexible and knowing how to adjust my style based on who I'm talking to and what the situation requires is crucial. It's about staying effective no matter what comes my way.

Lastly, team building—this is the heart of coaching. It's my job to bring together a group of individuals and turn them into a cohesive unit. I use my interaction skills to build trust, encourage teamwork, and create a culture where everyone feels like they're contributing to our success. When the team is united, it shows on the ice and makes us resilient in the face of challenges. So, in this role, it's not just about knowing the game. It's about mastering these interaction skills to lead effectively, keep everyone on the same page, and drive the team toward success.

### 3 Diary entries

#### 3.1 Week 1

Monday 4.8.2023

Today marks the first day of the season, and there's a sense of excitement and readiness among the players. Getting to know the players is crucial, and this process begins today. Today's exercises include physical tests and ice training in small groups. The primary focus is on the tests, specifically a bike-based VO2 max test that measures an athlete's oxygen utilization. These tests are conducted by our partner, a company specializing in physiotherapy. My role today is to oversee the on-ice training.

Tuesday 5.8.2023

The purpose of today is to conduct one-on-one interviews with selected athletes to understand their thoughts and beliefs about scoring, both on and off the ice. We will also review the tool I have selected for tracking their progress: an Excel table where players record the shots they take in games. Additionally, we will discuss how they can enhance their goal-scoring abilities through mental imagery and peer learning.

To implement peer learning effectively, I have planned a structured approach. Players will be paired up and given specific drills to practice together. Each pair will observe and provide feedback to each other, focusing on shooting techniques and strategies. This collaborative environment encourages players to learn from one another, fostering a sense of camaraderie and mutual support. I will guide this process by providing clear instructions and ensuring that the feedback is constructive and focused on improvement. Peer learning has been shown to be a very effective teaching method, encouraging cooperation, critical thinking, and social skills among students while improving their learning outcomes.

Research by Kim and Lee (2016) indicates that students who watched and copied their peers' shooting techniques showed more skill improvement than those who learned through conventional teaching methods. Peer modelling increased students' interest and participation in skill practice.

Wednesday 6.8.2023

Today, all players are together for a training session. With the physical tests completed, we can now focus on normal training, both off and on the ice. My aim for today is to observe the players during the on-ice session, particularly focusing on their performance in drills that involve shooting and scoring. I will mostly stay in the background, providing minimal feedback for now.

Thursday 7.8.2023

The morning began with an off-ice session, followed by on-ice training. The main focus was on learning team concepts and concentrating on these areas. I observed the players during practice, noting their habits and skills when they had a chance to shoot or had a scoring opportunity. After their shifts, I discussed their feelings and my observations about those situations.

Friday 8.8.2023

The last practice of the week was intense, as the coach wanted to assess the players' endurance and fitness. The ice session was split into two parts: the first focused on team play and tactics, while the second consisted of high intensity skating drills. I continued to observe the players, this time paying more attention to their skating skills and speed. I noticed that each player had unique strengths and weaknesses in skating: one was very agile and quick in changing directions, another had a strong stride and good acceleration, and the third had a smooth and efficient technique. I also observed how they handled fatigue and pressure: some maintained their intensity and focus until the end, while others began to lose their edge and make errors. After the practice, I briefly talked to the players, asking how they felt and what they thought they could improve in their skating. They provided truthful and helpful feedback, which I valued. I also offered some tips and advice on how to work on their skating during the off-season. This practice was very insightful for me, as I learned more about the players' physical and mental abilities, as well as their personalities and attitudes. It was also beneficial for them, as they received feedback and direction from me, along with a challenge and motivation from the coach. I am excited to see how they will perform in the upcoming games and practices.

Summary of Hockey Preparation Week:

This week marked the beginning of the hockey season, with a focus on preparing the team for upcoming challenges. We started with physical tests and ice training, which allowed me to observe and understand the players' strengths and areas for improvement. Throughout the week's training sessions, I closely monitored the players' performance, particularly in shooting and skating skills. The week culminated in a rigorous practice emphasizing endurance and fitness, where I provided feedback and guidance to the players.

Reflecting on this week, I realized the importance of continuous observation and feedback in player development. The insights gained from peer learning and mental imagery, supported by research, have been instrumental in shaping my approach. Peer learning has been shown to be a very effective teaching method, encouraging cooperation, critical thinking, and social skills among students while improving their learning outcomes. Research by Kim and Lee (2016) indicates that students

who watched and copied their peers' techniques showed more skill improvement than those who learned through conventional teaching methods. Peer modelling increased students' interest and participation in skill practice. Moving forward, I will continue to integrate these methods to enhance the players' skills and overall performance. This week has laid a solid foundation for the season ahead, and I am confident that the lessons learned will contribute to our success.

### 3.2 Week 2

Monday, 13.8.2023

The players began the new week with a high level of energy and motivation, showing their desire to continue the progress they achieved last week. We worked on enhancing their passing and positioning skills, using various drills and games to test them and encourage teamwork. The three players chosen for the thesis project also got individual coaching and instructions on how to use game theory in their ice hockey practice. They had to write down their self-reflections and observations after each practice, focusing on their scoring chances, their decision-making, and their emotions during the practice.

Throughout the session, I actively engaged with the players, using my communication skills to provide constructive feedback and encouragement. For example, when a player made a good pass or showed strong positioning, I immediately acknowledged their effort and explained why it was effective. This positive reinforcement helped to build their confidence and motivation. Additionally, when a player struggled with a particular drill or concept, I took the time to explain the mistake and offer guidance on how to improve. This approach not only helped them understand their errors but also showed them that mistakes are opportunities for learning and growth.

I also showed them some video analysis tools that they could use to evaluate their own and others' performance. By demonstrating how to use these tools effectively, I empowered the players to take ownership of their development. This not only enhanced their understanding of the game but also fostered a sense of responsibility and self-improvement.

The practice finished with a small area game, where I saw some improvement in their confidence and creativity, as well as some areas that still require work, such as defensive awareness and communication. During this game, I observed the players closely and provided real-time feedback, highlighting both their strengths and areas for improvement. This immediate feedback helped them to adjust their strategies and techniques on the fly, leading to more effective play.

Reflecting on the session, I believe that my approach to communication and feedback significantly impacted the players' learning and development. By providing clear, constructive feedback and encouraging self-reflection, I helped the players to understand their strengths and areas for

improvement. This not only enhanced their skills but also fostered a positive and supportive learning environment. Moving forward, I will continue to use these strategies to support the players' growth and development.

Tuesday 13.8.2023

We continued our week with an emphasis on offense, starting to go through more drills based on our gamebook. We also had a small area game, where I asked the players to be more strategic and rational in their actions and to anticipate and respond to their opponent's moves. They also cooperated more with their teammates and avoided unnecessary risks or conflicts. I was impressed by their learning ability and adaptation, and I gave them positive feedback and encouragement. After ice session, we had a little conversation with my selected athletes about how to be more effective at small area regarding to shooting more when the opportunity arises.

Wednesday 14.8.2023

Starting the day with an attention focus of being present at practice and also starting your day to be sure what you are going to learn today. Always having some kind of progress in your mind will boost up your focus. Attention acts as a cognitive spotlight, enabling individuals to select relevant information from their environment while filtering out distractions. Research in cognitive neuroscience and educational psychology emphasizes that sustained attention is pivotal for effective learning outcomes. Studies indicate that when learners direct their focus purposefully, they enhance their ability to process and retain information, leading to stronger memory formation

Thursday 15.8.2023

This day was the time to play our first pre-season game against Hokki. This was really a start for this season for players and the staff. Players who I have chosen to have in my project we quickly get a meeting and talk about just being present and let instincts take over at the game.

My job at the game was to take notes and watch how my players were into game theory of attacking plays, we had a little bit of touch on that topic in training and had drills to go through those ideas and how our team wanted to play at the offensive zone. The game ended with our win by 4-2 so we had a good start, and that first game was played so players now can relax a little bit more.

Friday 16.8.2023

The morning started to a recap of yesterday's game what we achieve and how we stuck in to our game plan. We watched a couple of clips from the game and then had a conversation about those. Because we played yesterday evening today's practice was little bit lighter and we also had the weekend off so everybody had time to take off from hockey.

Summary of this week:

We talk with players about how to be better at learning and why improving attention is crucial. During discussions with players, we emphasize the importance of improving attention and its critical role in learning and personal development. Attention acts as the foundation for effective learning and supports key cognitive functions. Below are the core aspects we address:

I conducted a one-on-one meeting with a player to deepen their understanding of offensive zone strategies, particularly focusing on cycle plays and situational decision-making. The session combined theoretical discussion and practical analysis, grounded in feedback and reflective learning principles.

During the meeting, we reviewed key aspects of our offensive zone playbook. I encouraged the player to articulate their understanding of cycle plays and share how they perceive the development of plays in various situations. To complement this discussion, we analysed clips from our first game, which provided tangible examples of the offensive strategies in action. This combination of dialogue and video analysis allowed the player to connect theoretical concepts with real-game scenarios, enhancing comprehension and retention.

This method aligns with Kolb's experiential learning cycle (1984), which emphasizes concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. By discussing theoretical concepts (abstract conceptualization) and reviewing game footage (concrete experience), the player was able to reflect on their performance and strategize improvements (reflective observation). This structured process ensures that learning is both personalized and actionable.

The player demonstrated improved clarity in understanding how to apply cycle plays in dynamic situations. Their ability to verbalize their thought process highlighted increased cognitive engagement with our offensive strategies. Furthermore, the session provided valuable insights into the player's perspective, allowing me to tailor future feedback and training sessions more effectively.

From this experience, I realized the importance of refining my own focus and attention during such interactions. To facilitate meaningful learning, I need to hone my ability to communicate complex concepts in a concise and structured manner. Additionally, I must continue to model the behaviours I encourage in players, such as maintaining focus and prioritizing tasks effectively. By doing so, I can better support players' development while advancing my own coaching competencies.

This experience reinforced the athlete-centered coaching philosophy, emphasizing individualized learning and collaborative problem-solving. It also underscored the value of integrating reflective

practices into coaching, which not only supports player development but also drives my growth as a coach. Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*.

### 3.3 Week 3

Monday 19.8.2023

Started this week with attention to really get inside my players knowledge about their knowledge of the offensive zone plays. We will play tomorrow our next preseason game against Hokki so I will have more time to reflect on how they played in that game. Mainly our focus is on the detail level of the game. When and why do you make reads or plays?

Tuesday 20.8.2023

Heading into this gameday we had light on and off-ice practice sessions. There was now a more relaxed atmosphere on the ice, maybe because we had already played one game. Today we had to travel on a bus to Kajaani, so it was an away game.

Wednesday 21.8.2023

Following yesterday's game against Hokki, we dedicated the day to video analysis and recovery-focused practice. The session centered on offensive zone positioning and decision-making, emphasizing the timing of attacks and creating better scoring opportunities.

During the video analysis, we reviewed key moments where players demonstrated both effective and uncertain decision-making. This allowed us to identify patterns in positioning and assess individual and team awareness in offensive situations. Discussing these moments with the players created an opportunity to clarify expectations and refine their understanding of our offensive systems. The light recovery practice that followed provided a chance to reinforce these concepts in a low intensity setting while maintaining physical recovery as a priority.

This session highlighted the importance of tailoring feedback to individual players' needs. Some players displayed strong situational awareness, while others required more guidance to recognize the timing and execution of specific plays. As a coach, I realized the need to improve my ability to communicate these nuances effectively. This aligns with the principles of athlete-centered coaching, where feedback is adapted to the player's current level of understanding and learning style.

Additionally, I reflected on the balance between providing constructive criticism and fostering a positive learning environment. By focusing on specific examples during the video review, I was able to deliver actionable feedback that players could apply immediately. This experience

reinforced my belief in the value of combining visual learning with practical reinforcement to enhance player development.

Through this process, I am continuing to develop my skills in analysing game performance, delivering individualized feedback, and designing practices that bridge the gap between learning and application. These are crucial areas for growth as I aim to become a more effective and impactful coach.

Thursday 22.8.2023

Back to a more intense practice today. We worked heavily on puck support and communication in the offensive zone. I noticed some improvement in the reads and awareness from the players based on yesterday's film session. We also did small-area games to work on tight space decision-making. The players are starting to better understand the importance of quick, smart decisions in the offensive zone.

Friday 23.8.2023

Today was all about special teams, focusing on power play and penalty kill. We dedicated the first half of practice to refining our power play structure—working on puck movement, quick passes, and finding lanes for shots. The second half was spent on penalty killing, emphasizing positioning and stick placement. The intensity was high as we're getting closer to the start of the season, and I can see the players are more engaged and focused. After practice, I had individual meetings with one of my players to discuss her roles and areas for improvement.

Summary of this week:

This week centered on deepening the team's understanding of offensive zone play and the decision-making behind it. Drawing on concepts from game sense theory, where players' tactical awareness and ability to read the game are crucial (Light, 2013), I focused on not just what plays the players were making, but why they were making them. The preseason game against Hokki was an opportunity to observe this in action and, through video analysis, we identified key moments where players' decision-making could improve. As Wein (2007) highlights, video analysis can be an effective tool to enhance tactical understanding by providing visual feedback.

Throughout the week, we balanced practice intensity, using lighter recovery days to promote both mental and physical recuperation (Jeffreys, 2005). We shifted towards improving puck support and communication, key aspects of successful offensive play as outlined by Smith (2003), with a specific focus on quick reads and decisions in small-area games. These exercises helped players

understand the importance of making fast, smart decisions in tight spaces, a crucial skill in modern hockey (Baker, 2015).

The individual meetings on Friday aligned with the coaching methodology of building player confidence and understanding their roles (Kidman & Lombardo, 2010), preparing the team for the competitive season ahead. This week gave me a good chance to get a deeper understanding of how to use video analysis tools to enhance teams and my own skills in reflecting games. Like Gallwey (2016, p. 83) suggests, "In short, there is no need to fight old habits. Start new ones. It is the resisting of an old habit that puts you in that trench." easy to say but still hard to keep it on my mind.

### 3.4 Week 4

Monday 26.8.2023

Started this week with a deeper focus on the learning process, particularly aiming to enhance my players' understanding of the offensive zone playbook. My goal is to help them connect individual skills with team concepts, making sure they grasp both their personal roles and the bigger picture. We began by breaking down specific offensive tactics from an individual and collective perspective. As a team, the aim is to be fully prepared for Thursday's home game against Keupa, so we are working on sharpening our offensive execution.

Tuesday 27.8.2023

This morning, I had a meeting with the project players to review video footage focusing on our offensive zone principles. It was an interactive session where I asked for their feedback on the small details—how they read the game, their decision-making in key moments, and their behaviors within our offensive framework. This allowed me to gauge their understanding and helped them reflect on how they can fine-tune their execution. The aim was to foster self-awareness and promote ownership of their role in our system, encouraging them to think critically about their actions on the ice.

Wednesday 28.8.2023

Today's practice session continued to focus on reinforcing our offensive zone principles, both at the individual and team levels. We worked through several drills that combined skill development with decision-making, allowing players to apply what we discussed in the video session yesterday. I paid close attention to how my project players responded to game-like situations, particularly how they made decisions under pressure. There was a clear improvement in their awareness and positioning, but we still need to refine their ability to anticipate plays rather than react to them. We also

did some work on puck possession and creating scoring chances, key components of our offensive playbook.

Thursday 29.8.2023

Game day against Keupa. Before the game, I held a short tactical meeting with the project players to revisit our offensive principles, emphasizing the key details we've been focusing on all week—timing, spacing, and decision-making. During the game, I was keenly observing how they applied these concepts. Overall, there were some positive moments where I saw players making more confident reads and quicker decisions in the offensive zone. However, there were still some areas where hesitation led to missed opportunities. After the game, I reflected on the progress and planned to address these gaps in the coming sessions.

Friday 30.8.2023

We wrapped up the week with a detailed post-game review. In our meeting with the project players, we analyzed specific situations from last night's game. I encouraged them to reflect on their actions and decision-making, tying it back to the offensive zone principles we've been working on. There was a productive discussion about where improvements could be made, and I saw that many players are beginning to better understand the importance of details in creating scoring chances. We finished the session with some drills aimed at refining these areas, keeping the focus on applying knowledge from both an individual and team perspective.

Summary of this week:

This week was centered on enhancing the players' comprehension of offensive zone principles and aligning their individual skills with our team strategies. The goal was to deepen their understanding and application of our playbook, setting the stage for Thursday's game against Keupa. This week, I faced the challenge of maintaining a positive mindset despite experiencing stress and inadequate sleep. These factors tested my ability to manage my behaviour and emotional state, especially in high-pressure situations. As a coach and leader, it's essential to model resilience and composure, even when I am not at my mental best.

Stress and lack of rest can significantly impact cognitive functioning, including decision-making, emotional regulation, and interpersonal interactions. Research indicates that when under stress, individuals are more likely to exhibit reactive behaviours rather than proactive, solution-oriented responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In my case, I noticed moments where my patience and focus were tested, making it harder to sustain a positive approach in challenging situations.

To counteract these effects, I consciously applied strategies grounded in mindfulness and emotional regulation. These included short, focused breathing exercises that helped me regain composure during moments of tension, a method supported by studies showing deep breathing's ability to lower cortisol levels and promote calm (Jerath et al., 2006). I also used positive self-talk by reframing challenges as opportunities for growth, a cognitive-behavioural approach that shifted my perspective and helped me maintain a constructive outlook. Additionally, I recognized the impact of poor sleep and adjusted my routines to prioritize quality rest by limiting screen time before bed and focusing on recovery practices during the day.

This experience reinforced the importance of self-awareness in professional development. As a coach, it is crucial to manage my emotional state effectively. By implementing techniques to maintain focus and positivity, I was able to navigate the week without letting external pressures affect my performance or relationships. Furthermore, this challenge highlighted the importance of modeling resilience for my players. Demonstrating the ability to adapt and recover in difficult circumstances reinforces the values I aim to instil in them—such as accountability, perseverance, and emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

This week's experience aligns with Goleman's (1995) framework of emotional intelligence, particularly the components of self-regulation and self-awareness. These skills are fundamental for leadership and form the foundation for effective communication and decision-making under stress. Moving forward, I will continue refining these techniques and exploring additional strategies for stress management, such as structured reflection and time-blocking.

### 3.5 Week 5

Monday 2.9.2023

Started the week with an emphasis on integrating our offensive zone principles following our game against Keupa. The focus was on addressing the hesitations observed and improving the players' decision-making under pressure. We worked on specific drills designed to enhance their ability to read the game and make quick, effective choices. The practice was tailored to address areas where we saw gaps, particularly in the execution of our offensive strategies.

Tuesday 3.9.2023

Today's session included a detailed video review of our recent games, focusing on the upcoming away game against IPK. We analysed key moments from our previous games and discussed how these could be applied to our strategy for IPK. The goal was to ensure that players understand how to adapt our offensive principles. We also did targeted drills to work on specific aspects of our offensive play to learn more about our playbook and be on the same page.

Wednesday 4.9.2023

Practice today was more about being ready for the IPK match. We focused on a positive environment. The intensity was high, and we worked on maintaining focus and composure while executing our offensive plays. This practice aimed to be more aware in situations that will occur in a game, and how we want to play in those situations as a team.

Thursday 5.9.2023

Travel day to IPK for the away game. We had a light, focused practice in the morning to keep the players sharp and mentally prepared. Emphasis was on staying relaxed and confident, ensuring that players are ready to adapt and execute under the pressure of a game environment.

Friday 6.9.2023

Following the game against IPK, we had a review session. The focus was on evaluating how well the players adapted our offensive principles in an away setting. We discussed what worked well and identified areas where adjustments are needed. The feedback centered on understanding how to handle different game dynamics and improving performance in similar future situations. The week concluded with having focus on getting good practice after the game day. Also, skating conditions were included in end of practice.

Summary of this week:

This week was focused on refining our offensive zone strategies and preparing for our away game against IPK. The emphasis was on improving decision-making and execution under pressure, addressing challenges observed in previous games.

We began with targeted drills aimed at enhancing players' ability to make quick, effective decisions in the offensive zone. These practices were designed to close specific gaps and deepen their understanding of our offensive principles. This type of targeted training is essential for fostering a proactive, problem-solving mindset among the players. Reflecting on these drills, I recognized the need to continuously assess my approach to drills and how I can better tailor them to individual players' learning styles. This alignment of training with personal growth is a key component of athlete-centered coaching.

On Tuesday, we conducted a detailed video review, which was instrumental in tailoring our strategy for the IPK game. Watching the footage alongside the players provided an opportunity to discuss key moments and reinforce the tactical principles we had worked on earlier in the week. I noticed that breaking down the video helped me hone my communication skills—articulating the key takeaways in a way that players could easily understand and apply in real-time. This practice not

only developed my feedback delivery but also reinforced my understanding of how players process and internalize information.

Midweek practices featured scenario-based drills to simulate various game conditions and ensure players could effectively apply their knowledge in different situations. These sessions are vital for helping players translate theoretical knowledge into action under game conditions. It made me realize how important it is to create an environment where players can experiment with different solutions and adapt to new challenges. I feel I've grown in my ability to structure these drills to push players while ensuring they feel confident in applying the learned concepts.

Thursday's practice was lighter, focusing on keeping players sharp and mentally prepared before traveling to IPK. We reviewed our game plan and reinforced our offensive strategies to ensure readiness for the match. Reflecting on this, I see how valuable it is to manage the emotional and physical load leading up to the game. I've become more attuned to the balance of intensity and recovery, understanding that mental preparation is just as crucial as physical readiness for high stakes matches.

The week concluded with a comprehensive reflection session following the IPK game. This included a one-on-one reflection session with my project player, where we discussed his individual performance, decision-making, and application of our offensive principles. This personalized feedback helped identify specific areas for improvement and reinforced successful strategies. Reflecting on this one-on-one interaction, I felt that my ability to provide actionable, specific feedback has improved. It was rewarding to see how the player internalized the feedback and used it to reflect on his performance.

The insights gained from these sessions will inform our focus for the coming weeks, ensuring continued progress and targeted development. Overall, this week has strengthened my ability to adapt my coaching approach to individual needs and ensure that feedback is always constructive and forward-looking. This experience has also underscored the importance of reflection in continuous improvement—not just for the players but for me as a coach.

### 3.6 Week 6

Monday 9.9.2023

This week begins with a renewed emphasis on building and expanding the project with my players. The focus is on enhancing their understanding and application of our offensive zone strategies, with a particular aim to deepen their individual and collective development. We will start by revisiting our core principles and exploring ways to integrate these more effectively into each player's

role. The goal is to build on the progress made so far and identify areas where further development can be achieved.

Tuesday 10.9.2023

Today's session will be dedicated to further individual reflections and tailored feedback. Each of my project player will have a chance to discuss their recent performances and set specific goals for improvement. We'll review video footage to highlight both strengths and areas for growth. This personalized approach is intended to help players understand how they can better align their actions with our offensive strategies and enhance their contributions to the team.

Wednesday 11.9.2023

Practice will focus on incorporating feedback from individual sessions into team drills. We will work on integrating the refined offensive zone principles into our team play, with an emphasis on improving cohesion and communication. Drills will be designed to help players apply their individual improvements in a team context, ensuring that their enhanced skills contribute to overall team effectiveness.

Thursday 12.9.2023

We prepared for our away game against Keupa. A tactical meeting reviewed key elements from our recent practices and ensured that players were clear on their roles and responsibilities for the game. The emphasis was on maintaining consistency and applying our refined strategies effectively during the match.

Friday 13.9.2023

Following the away game against Keupa, we chose not to have a review session immediately to allow players some time to reflect individually. This approach was intended to give them a break and time to process their performance before discussing it collectively.

Week 6 Summary

The week began with targeted drills designed to refine players' decision-making and execution in the offensive zone. We incorporated feedback from individual reflection sessions, which allowed players to identify specific areas for improvement and align their actions with our team strategies. This process reflects the principles of experiential learning, where players gain insights through practice and reflection, leading to deeper understanding and skill development.

In my role, I facilitated the integration of these individual reflections into the team's overall approach. My responsibility was not only to guide the players in understanding their areas for improvement but also to ensure that the drills were tailored to address their specific needs. This required a balance between individual coaching and maintaining team coherence, ensuring that both aspects worked together to improve overall performance.

From a professional development perspective, this week underscored the importance of adaptive coaching. I learned to refine my feedback to be more specific and actionable, ensuring that players could clearly connect their personal reflections to the drills and strategies we were implementing. This aligns with the concept of feedback loops in coaching, where continuous reflection and adjustment lead to sustained improvement (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). I also realized the value of personalized coaching in fostering player engagement and development. By actively listening and tailoring feedback, I was able to foster a deeper understanding of the game, not only from a tactical perspective but also in terms of how players think and process situations.

Additionally, I recognized the need to further develop my skills in providing real-time feedback during drills. While reflection sessions were beneficial, I saw the value of offering guidance on the spot, helping players adjust their decisions and actions instantly. This ability to give concise and relevant feedback during practice is something I aim to improve upon as I work to become a more effective communicator on the ice.

## 2 Discussion and conclusion

Over the past period, I have experienced significant personal development in various areas. One of the key aspects has been enhancing my personal skills when working with players. I've focused on building strong connections with them, allowing for more open communication and better understanding of their individual needs and motivations. This has led to improved teamwork and collaboration, creating a more cohesive unit on the field.

In addition, my leadership skills have been refined through my interactions with the coaching staff. By observing and learning from their approaches, I've gained valuable insights into effective coaching strategies and team management. This experience has equipped me with the tools to inspire and motivate our players, fostering a sense of unity and purpose within the team.

Moreover, I've made a conscious effort to cultivate a more positive mindset. This shift in perspective has helped me navigate challenges with resilience and optimism, which I believe is crucial in both sports and personal life. By maintaining a positive outlook, I can encourage those around me to adopt a similar attitude, ultimately contributing to a more supportive environment.

Lastly, I've placed emphasis on my body language, ensuring that it conveys positivity and confidence. Positive body language not only enhances my interactions with teammates but also sets a standard for the overall team dynamic. By embodying positivity, I aim to uplift the spirits of those around me, fostering a culture of encouragement and motivation.

While writing a diary-based thesis, I learned the importance of self-reflection and consistent documentation of my experiences. This process helped me to deepen my understanding of my thoughts, emotions, and the evolution of my ideas over time. I also discovered the value of structured writing, as organizing my reflections into coherent entries allowed me to identify patterns and insights that might have otherwise gone unnoticed.

Additionally, the experience taught me how to balance personal narrative with academic rigor, as I had to analyze my experiences critically while maintaining a personal voice. Engaging with feedback from peers and advisors enhanced my analytical skills, enabling me to articulate my findings more effectively. Overall, this journey not only enriched my academic skills but also fostered personal growth and greater self-awareness.

During my thesis, I discovered several interesting insights that I believe will be highly beneficial for my future development, both personally and professionally. One of the most important realizations was the power of reflection. Through the process of regularly documenting my thoughts, experiences, and challenges, I gained a deeper understanding of events that might have gone unnoticed

in the moment. Reflection not only helped me analyse my decisions and behaviours but also provided clarity on how small changes could lead to significant growth. This habit of reflecting will be an invaluable tool moving forward, as it allows me to continuously learn from my experiences—whether they are successes or challenges—and apply those lessons to future situations. The ability to regularly assess my own progress and decision-making will ensure that I remain adaptable and open to improvement.

Another key observation was the importance of adaptability. I noticed how my mindset and reactions evolved as I faced different situations throughout my thesis journey. Whether it was adjusting to new information, changing circumstances, or unexpected obstacles, I learned that flexibility is essential to overcoming challenges. This adaptability will be critical in the future as I navigate new roles, responsibilities, and environments. The capacity to shift perspectives and strategies as needed will ensure that I remain resilient in the face of change, an essential skill in both professional and personal contexts.

A particularly interesting discovery was the importance of communication, both verbal and non-verbal. Throughout the thesis process, I became more aware of how my communication style influenced relationships and team dynamics. I realized that effective communication goes beyond words; body language, tone, and even the timing of conversations plays a significant role in how messages are received. This insight will be especially useful in future roles, where working with teams or leading others will require strong communication skills. By being more mindful of how I communicate, I will be able to build stronger relationships, foster collaboration, and lead more effectively in professional settings.

Looking ahead, these lessons will serve as a foundation for my continued growth. The habit of reflection will help me stay self-aware and ensure that I am constantly learning from my experiences. My understanding of adaptability will allow me to navigate future challenges with confidence, knowing that flexibility is key to overcoming obstacles. Recognizing patterns in my behaviour will help me make intentional improvements and leverage my strengths more effectively. And the importance of communication will guide me in building stronger connections with those around me, whether in personal relationships or professional teams.

In summary, I have developed a more robust skill set, adopted a positive and growth-oriented mindset, improved my physical health and fitness, and strengthened my relationships through effective communication. These areas of growth have positioned me for continued success and personal fulfilment in the future, allowing me to face challenges with confidence and embrace new opportunities as they arise.

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