

High Schools

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HOCKEY

SIDELINES: REPLAY HELPS TITANS PLAY **State-of-the art program key in St. John's success**

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A high-tech tool should be given an assist every time the St. John's Jesuit hockey team skates off with a win.

The Titans employ a state-of-the-art video analysis software system to break down their game film. The SportsCode Gamebreaker is part teaching tool, part scouting device and a valuable time saver.

Coach Mike Hayes said the software played a key role in the Titans' run to the Division I state title last season.

"I told [Gamebreaker officials] I would do a testimonial," Hayes said. "We never lost to anyone the second time we played them."

The Mac-based system, which includes a laptop and camera, allows the user to create video segments for every game situation. Every face-off, for example, can be broken down into one long, seamless segment.



St. John's assistant coach Todd Switala operates a computer during a game against Northview at Tam O'Shanter. Switala charts the action into a program which helps as a teaching tool for the Titans.
(THE BLADE/LORI KING)

“A certain line can watch only their shifts in a game,” Hayes said.

Senior captain Cam Hauenstein said the ability to focus on the play of his line with Dan Johnson and Chase Parsell is very beneficial.

“You don’t have to wade through what the other lines are doing and we can just focus on what we need to do,” he said.

Todd Switala, who is a former head coach at Central Catholic, is the video coach at St. John’s and runs the system. Switala codes the games as they are being played while Ben Harley, the goalie coach, runs the video recorder.

Switala said he has about 30 codes that he punches in for certain game situations, such as breakouts, forechecks and power plays. Switala simply hits a key that corresponds with a situation that is happening. For example, he hits the “A” button when a breakout is about to occur and a “K” for a penalty kill.



Ben Harley operates the video camera. St. John’s records the action to help improve its team and scout others. The system allows the user to create video segments for every game situation.
(THE BLADE/LORI KING)

“I press a button and the system will code it and put it in a time line and the coaching staff can isolate things and show the team,” he said. “If there is an odd man rush against us, I push that button and it gives me a lead time and a lag time. It will drop that piece of videotape into a time line and then coach Hayes can go back and look at that sequence.”

The instant instruction is invaluable, according to Hayes whose team is off to a 9-2 start this season.

“When they’re on the bench, they just do not see it,” he said. “Then they see it on film and see exactly what they are doing.”

Occasionally, Hayes will create DVDs for players to watch at home.

Junior Ray Morris said the biggest bonus is the system’s ability to center on a particular aspect of the game.

“It breaks it up and lets you focus on one main point in practice,” he said. Hauenstein said he appreciates the system’s ability to help prepare for opponents.

“My linemates and I get to look at the other team’s top line and see what they do and how we can stop them,” Hauenstein said. “We don’t see the Cleveland teams as much. But we can have them on film and see what they are doing and study it.”

The forward said it also allows the players to see the errors they’re making so that they can fix them in practice.

“There is a negative side that we can get called out. But that can be turned into a positive,” he said. “If we do something the right way they will point that out as well and tell other players, ‘This is how it should happen.’”

Morris said what used to take hours to break down can be done instantaneously.

“During games you do not notice what you’re doing wrong. They can pull up things on the video right away,” he said. “The criticism helps.”

Hayes said in previous seasons he would have parents videotape the games and he would then break down the entire film.

“You had to show it to them in chronological order,” he said. “So one second, you’d be talking about a breakout and the next you’d be on to the forecheck and then right on to the power play. I found it was random teaching and not time effective. The kids would lose their focus.”

Hayes said he learned about the new software from former St. John’s coach Mike Mankowski, who is using it as the coach at Canisius College.

“He got it from the Buffalo Sabres,” Hayes said.

Hayes said he received permission from the parents in the program to spend \$8,000 for the entire system. He said the team is 85 percent self-funded through gate receipts, T-shirt sales and other fund-raisers.

“I wanted something long term and I thought it would be useful,” he said. The Northview and Bowling Green programs also recently purchased the system. John Hauge, who is Northview’s video coach, said the players can make a DVD of each of their shifts.

“It’s a sweet program,” Hauge said. “It’s capable of doing so much.”

Switala added two new buttons last Friday. The keys isolate offensive and defensive zone face-offs.

“Mike can look at back checks and goals for and goals against — anything he wants to look at it we can create it,” Switala said.

Hayes said the software allows him to find his opponents’ systems and tendencies.

“You can see what they like to do. You see how they run their power play and penalty kill,” he said. “You can find things you can use against them.”

Hayes said after his team beat Hunting Valley University School in the state semifinal last March, he went directly back to his hotel to use Gamebreaker to scout the Titans’ foe in the final, Parma Padua.

“We did want to be too presumptuous so we only practiced for University School,” he said. “I went back to my room and got out the computer and put together a game plan in two hours and we had a meeting later that night with the kids to give them the game plan.”