

The Torpedo System

e-Interview with Coach Jeff German

April 17, 2016

This is the full e-Interview with Coach Jeff German of the Newark Generals JV team in Newark, Ohio.

[Coach Traugott: What were the one or two deciding factors for you to implement the Torpedo System this past season?](#)

Coach German: I had heard of the Torpedo for years and had known the success the Swedish Team had with it in the Olympics. I have always been a student of Tarasov and the fundamental elements of Russian style hockey. As Tarasov put it so eloquently, (and this is a paraphrase), "Hockey is much more like a ballet than a battle." I subscribe to this mindset. While as a player, I led the league in penalty minutes, as a coach, I always favor a strong offensive scheme.

I realized early last season that we were a team with very little size, great speed, skill and goaltending. I thought I needed to move toward a "stretch" type of scheme. So I did a web search on the Torpedo and found (Coach Traugott's) book "Torpedo Hockey". I purchased the book to read on my vacation in June. I read it one night and woke my assistant coach, Patrick Brighton, up with a phone call the next morning. I said, "I am going to send you a book, please read it because I think this can revolutionize the way we compete next year." He got back to me in a few hours and concurred that this was the system for us.

[Coach Traugott: What in particular did you like about the system before the season?](#)

Coach German: I particularly liked the idea of stretching the ice. I knew that with my incoming personnel, we could get behind the opponent's D directly from a breakout. I also liked the idea that we play with a fourth forward as in the Russian systems. Years past we tried to get the D to join the rush, but this never turned out to be as effective as setting a system up with 4 strong forechecking forwards. Additionally, previous years we played a 2-3, and we coached a very aggressive strong side "D" pinch. This put the F3 high on the boards taking away a forward down low, contrarily, the Torpedo easily moved into a 1-3-1 on a fore-check and I knew our players would love that.

[Coach Traugott: How did you approach "selling" the system to your players?](#)

Coach German: Once Patrick and I decided this was the system we needed to implement, I sat down with the team leaders from the previous year; Captains, Goalies and Defensemen. I took some of the diagrams in the book and brought my dry erase

board. We sat at a coffee shop and talked it through. The boys loved the idea, but they were skeptical, as was I. I expected to fall flat the first few games of the season and take a few on the chin before we could turn a corner. I never imagine we would go 38-0 before we suffered a tie and a loss at States.

[Coach Traugott: What were some of the modifications you made to the system?](#)

Coach German: We tweaked the breakout by having the strong side Torpedo stay home and post up on the D as opposed to running. This kept our Torpedoes from bailing out on our zone. At the same time, we played man on man on the opponent D and 3 on 3 down low with our two half backs and defenseman. Once we gained possession, the weak side winger became the runner, strong side remained available for a chip out or a ladder-out if necessary; Most times the play went, D to Half back to weak side running Torpedo.

Patrick developed a defensive zone modification that dropped a designated Torpedo down into the passing lane shutting down the cross-ice pass while the other designated Torpedo was responsible for both defensive point men. This worked well with teams that moved the puck laterally very well.

We also used a zone entry that took the puck low and pulled the opponent D down to allow our two halfbacks to come into the zone. Of course, we took the shot on the rush if we had it, but most times, driving low confused our opponent and allowed us to set up. We then played a 1-3-1 as if we were on a power play with the weak-side halfback checking back to the top of the circle in a defensive (point man) role. Occasionally we would move halfbacks higher or lower depending on the opponent defensive zone scheme. Our D stayed with his nose on the puck side to side. The halfbacks toggled back and forth as the puck changed sides.

These were most of the big tweaks. But in most cases, we stuck to the system as written.

[Coach Traugott: In hindsight, what in particular did you like about the system?](#)

Coach German: As I said before, I like any system that rewards offense. All of our players' eyes lit up when I explained that we play defense by playing offense. This was certainly the case. Our time of possession and offensive zone time of possession were off the chart. The Torpedo created a system where even the laziest kid on the team was back checking because he thought it was part of the offense. That is a game changer at the High School level. High School age players will work exponentially harder if they think it is directly benefitting them with a scoring chance or a shot at a highlight reel.

I was also surprised that we actually gave up less odd man rushes this season than the previous season while running a 2-3. Even with one defenseman back in the Torpedo,

the weak side halfback knew that he had to retreat and support the defenseman. I can't think of a time when they let us down.

Finally, we outscored our opponents by a pretty wide margin. The overall season goal differential was an impressive 232 goals for (5.8 goals per game) while only allowing 59 total goals against (1.47 per game).

Coach Traugott: What were the biggest challenges you faced in implementing the system?

Coach German: My assistant coach, Patrick Brighton said it early in the season, "the thing is, we live and die by this system, there is no laying back". Essentially, with the bench rearranged and a 4 forward format, you are forced to play through a period before making any system changes. We never had the need to change up, but I could see that being a challenge with some opponents.

Bench management is the steepest learning curve. You must make sure your Torpedoes change on the back check, which is contrary to what they have been coached to do all their years. This not only get's fresh legs on the ice against an opponent rush, it also gains 20-30 feet of ice as the fresh Torpedoes head out the D side of the bench on a back check and the exhausted Torpedoes head to the offensive door. We literally practiced coaching the bench during line play at practices. The coaches have to be as well trained as the players on the system.

Another challenge is getting your head around the idea that you only need 3 defensemen all season. We played with 2 most of the year, and brought back a halfback when we felt one needed a break or we lost one to a penalty or injury.

Coach Traugott: Do you feel that the system helped in player development?

Coach German: Yes, maybe more so than I have ever seen.

In what way?

Coach German: Our players possessed a confidence in their teammates that afforded them the means to be creative. Read and react became much clearer to them because they knew what they were looking for in an opponents actions. For example, Torpedoes knew that by pressuring from underneath, opponent defensemen tended to rim the puck along the dasher where our halfback waited for it. As a result, once the opponent made the predictable play, our Torpedoes drove hard to the net. It was as if it were a set play.

In addition, our players learned to cycle and move to open ice as a result of having a 4th forward. This taught our players to be patient and maintain possession. I watched one

of my players develop from a 3rd line grinder in the previous season to a soft-handed goal scoring Torpedo this past season. I could go on for page after page with examples.

Coach Traugott: [Would you do it again?](#)

Coach German: I expect to run the Torpedo next season. In fact, if the College team (Denison University) I am coaching has enough numbers, I will implement parts, if not all, of the Torpedo System

Coach Traugott: [Anything else?](#)

Coach German: I don't know if this is a direct result of the Torpedo or not, but we were the least penalized team, by a lot, in the league. I don't know the stats, but when I looked at the league stats, we had 60 some less penalty minutes to the next closest team. I attribute it to being on the offense at all times which makes the players more precise in their checking, less intimidation and more execution.

Coach German: Thank you for taking a complex system and simplifying it to be played at any level. I took a lot of heat and skepticism from my coaching colleagues and administrators when I brought this in the rink. My Assistant Coach Patrick, to his credit, bought in from first mention. Your book opened a door toward a system I feel hockey should move toward.