Does 35 into 24 = me?

Why making it out of camp to be on the opening night roster might well be your season high.

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35 → 24

It’s a time-old ritual in hockey. Every August, roughly 35 players walk into a pre-season training camp fighting for 24 spots on the opening night roster. That math doesn’t change because you had a good summer. This guide is about controlling the things that are in your control — your preparation, the way you pace yourself over camp, how you’re fueling, and how you recover — so that when the opening night roster is posted, you know you gave the coaching staff nothing to second-guess.

Camp is an evaluation, not a place to get into shape

The staff is watching first-shift habits, not projecting how fit you'll be in six weeks. That means your off-ice preparation must be finished before you walk in the door.

- **Conditioning:** Aerobic base and skating-specific conditioning should be in place at least 3-4 weeks out — camp is not where you find your legs.
- **On-ice sharpness:** Sharpen the compete pieces — battle drills, small-area games, puck protection — since ice time and reps at camp are limited and heavily weighted in evaluation.
- **Taper, don't peak early:** While schedules vary from camp to camp the intensity and effort required do not. Camp is hard, camp can be long. It is the ultimate meritocracy – the strong do survive.

Cover your bases

- **Gear check:** Pack extra tape, a backup mouthguard, and a full second set of gear. What's your plan for when things do not go as you want?
- **Logistics:** Know your schedule, know your report times. Know how long the drive from your billets to the gym is, know how long it takes to get to the rink. Know your route and when traffic may be heavy. Being late is unprofessional and sends the coaching staff a message you don't want to send.

Camp is a multi-day audition

The biggest mistake incoming players make is treating day one like it's the only day that matters. The players who fade by day three lose more ground than they gained by sprinting on day one.

- **Day one:** Push hard but skate every drill like there are many more to come — because there are.
- **Mid-camp:** This is where roster spots are separated. Save something for the scrimmages; consistency across sessions matters more than one highlight shift.
- **Final sessions:** Coaches specifically watch who is still competing hard in puck battles when everyone else is running on fumes. Composure and detail under fatigue is the tell.

Manage the whole day

- **Energy management:** A hard first period followed by a quiet third tells the staff more about your ceiling than they'd like it to. Manage your effort so your level doesn't fall off a cliff.
- **Fuel appropriately:** Pre-plan each day — know your schedule and when you will be fueling — meal prep meals and snacks around when you will be in the gym or on the ice.
- **Rest, recover & sleep:** When your season depends on it, camp is not the time for late nights. Sleep is the #1 legal performance enhancing tool athletes can use. And it's free!

14+ hrs

A typical camp day includes a gym session, one to two on-ice sessions, video reviews, scrimmages and off-ice testing. Days are long — often 14+ hours from wake-up to lights out — so treat the in-between time as part of the job, not downtime.

Build your day around the sessions

Camp schedules leave narrow windows to eat. If you don't plan around them, you'll either show up to a session running on empty or sit in a meeting feeling sluggish.

- **Before the morning skate:** Eat 2.5-3 hours before the first skate (oats, eggs, toast, fruit) — enough time to digest, not race the whistle on a full stomach.
- **Immediately after:** Simple carbs and fluids in the first 20-30 minutes off the ice — a banana, a sports drink, chocolate milk — before you even shower.

Through the afternoon

- **Follow-up meal:** A real meal with lean protein and carbs (chicken and rice, a turkey sandwich with fruit) within about an hour of stepping off the ice.
- **Before an afternoon session:** Light, familiar carbs and protein 60-90 minutes out — this is not the time to try new food or overeat.
- **Hydration:** Water and electrolytes through the whole day, not just at practice — dorm rooms and rinks are both easy places to quietly under-drink.

Into the evening

- **Evening:** A carb-forward dinner (pasta, rice, potatoes with protein) sets up tomorrow's session more than tonight's soreness does.
- **Bedtime protein snack:** Kick start overnight muscle recovery with a small (1 cup cottage cheese or small 25 grams protein shake) before bed.

Between sessions, same day

- **Cool down properly:** 10-15 minutes of easy movement and stretching before you sit down — don't go straight from the bench to a chair.
- **Get out of wet gear:** Change out of wet gear immediately; sitting in sweat-soaked layers between sessions slows everything else down.
- **Rest, don't just relax:** A 20-30 minute lie-down between sessions, if the schedule allows, does more for you than scrolling your phone in the lobby.
- **Light recovery tools:** Compression gear, a light foam-roll, or a cold shower between sessions are useful extras — but food, fluids, and rest do the heavy lifting.

Overnight, setting up tomorrow

- **Sleep is the priority:** Camp performance is cumulative — 7-9 hours a night is the single biggest lever you control, and the one most players cut first.
- **Late fuel:** A protein-containing snack before bed (Greek yogurt, cottage cheese) supports overnight recovery, especially after a two-a-day.
- **Wind down:** Keep phones and screens out of the last 30-45 minutes before lights out — adrenaline and screen time both delay real recovery sleep.
- **Prep for tomorrow:** Lay out gear, food, and your schedule the night before — a calm, unrushed morning is worth more than an extra 20 minutes of sleep spent scrambling.

The bottom line

You can’t control who else is in the room or how the staff weighs the decision.

You can control whether you show up prepared, pace yourself so your best hockey shows up on the last day and not just the first, and fuel and recover well enough that fatigue is never the reason you got cut.

Handle those four things, and you’ve done everything camp can be won on.