

# ACE HANDBOOK

## Table of Contents

Forward

Chapter 1 – ACE Program Job Titles and Job Descriptions

Chapter 2 – The Association Hockey Director-ACE

Chapter 3- The Association Hockey Director and the local association

- Delivering coaching workshops
- Heads Up Hockey
- Evaluating coaches and providing feedback
- Establishing and maintaining a resource center for coaches

Chapter 4 – CEP and ACE/certification requirements

Chapter 5 – Lines of communication with USA Hockey

Chapter 6 – USA Hockey Program Implementation

- Skill Development and Cross-Ice Programs
- Player Development Program
- Parent Ed Program

# FORWARD

## WELCOME TO THE ACE PROGRAM

On behalf of USA Hockey, thank you for accepting the position of Association Hockey Director-ACE for your local association. As Association Hockey Director, you are a vital communication link between your local association and USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program. USA Hockey wants to support you in your new position. We will hold an ACE Training Session in your area, where you will learn about the ACE Program and your role in it. Your District Associate Coach-in Chief - ACE will work closely with you to keep you informed of the latest coaching information, which you will be able to share with your association's coaches. We will make it possible for you to track the coaching certification requirements in your association. We will make presentation materials regarding Parent Awareness available to you in order that you may present this information to your parents and coaches. Our ACE Newsletter will be sent to you so that you will get the latest information from USA Hockey.

This manual is designed to help you in your efforts to serve as your Association's Hockey Director. Good luck, and thanks again for your service to USA Hockey and to your local association.

Regards,

USA Hockey

Ace Handbook

Publication of USA Hockey, Inc.

Special thanks to all the District Ace Directors and Coaches section members who contributed to the Ace Director Handbook

# CHAPTER ONE

## ACE JOB TITLES and DESCRIPTIONS

### **Director, Coaching Education Program**

#### **National Coach in Chief**

**National Associate Coach-in-Chief - ACE:** The Coaches Section will appoint a National Associate Coach-in-Chief responsible for the ACE Program. This appointment is subject to the approval of the Executive Director of USA Hockey.

This position is under the supervision of the USA Hockey Director of the Coaching Education Program and the National Coach-in-Chief. The National Associate Coach-in-Chief - ACE will assist in the development and presentation of materials for the USA Hockey ACE Program.

**District Associate Coach-in-Chief - ACE:** There will be one District Associate Coach-in-Chief responsible for the ACE Program for each registration district.

The District Associate Coach-in-Chief - ACE will be appointed by the District Coach-in-Chief, subject to the approval of the USA Hockey Director of the Coaching Program and the National Coach-in-Chief. This individual will be responsible for the supervision/training and administration of the District ACE Program.

**Affiliate ACE Coordinator:** In multi-affiliate districts the District Associate Coach-in-Chief - ACE, in cooperation with the Affiliate CEP Director and the Affiliate President, may choose to appoint an Affiliate ACE Coordinator.

The Affiliate ACE Coordinator will be responsible for supervision, training and administration of the Association ACE personnel and programs.

**Association Hockey Director - ACE:** Each Association (sub-affiliate) will have a Hockey Director who is responsible for the distribution of USA Hockey material and information.

This is perhaps the most important link in the USA Hockey Coaching Program chain. This individual will be appointed by the local association and will work closely with District/Affiliate ACE personnel.

# Affiliate ACE Coordinator

## SUMMARY:

The Association Hockey Director is responsible for the implementation of the USA Hockey Coaching Education Programs through a network of Association Hockey Directors - ACE. The objective is successful implementation of parent and coaching education and player skill development at the local hockey association level.

## ESSENTIAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

1. Provide leadership, organization and training to the Association Hockey Director/ACE Coordinator to implement ACE programs.
  - a. Train and assist local Association Hockey Director/ACE Coordinators with implementation of ACE programs.
  - b. Work with local Hockey Association Hockey Director/ACE Coordinators to establish the following ACE initiatives at the local hockey association:
    - i. Educational training for parents and coaches
    - ii. Player skill development through USAH skill development and cross-ice programs and local skill development sessions
    - iii. CEP Training and certification requirements
    - iv. Increasing practice to game ratios
    - v. Local association skill development training sessions for coaches
    - vi. Coach mentoring
    - vii. Coaching resource library
2. Participate in the on-going development of the hockey education programs
  - a. Member of the affiliate development committees
  - b. Collect feedback from local Association Hockey Directors/ACE Coordinators
  - c. Assist with improvements to existing programs and the development of new programs
3. Assist USA Hockey District Coach-in-Chief with communication and promotion of tools and resources to assist coaches in teaching fundamental skills.
  - a. Assist with distribution of various training materials
  - b. Communicate and promote coach development/training opportunities

## QUALIFICATIONS:

- Coaching experience and level 3 or 4 CEP certification
- Hockey Director or Association ACE Coordinator experience
- Local Hockey Association Board experience
- Communication skills
- Organizational, planning and execution skills

# CHAPTER TWO

## The Association Hockey Director

The Association Hockey Director - ACE is an experienced individual with a strong coaching background who serves as the administrative link to USA Hockey and its Coaching Education Program (CEP). In their role, Association Hockey Directors organize and manage CEP requirements, assist the local association in the development of a well-trained coaching staff, promote parent education and provide clear goals and objectives for player skill development.

### **Who are the Association Hockey Directors?**

The Association Hockey Director is an individual within a local association who has a strong coaching background, hockey knowledge and commitment to the sport. This person must be able to communicate a long-term vision of these goals and objectives and be able "to sell" them to the association. As part of the communication skills needed, the Association Hockey Director must be comfortable educating coaches, players, parents and association board members. Effective administrative skills are essential to ensure that the association coaches meet the CEP certification requirements. This person must have a strong inclination toward skill development of players in the association and exhibit a "love of the game."

### **What are the job responsibilities of the Association Hockey Director?**

- Plan, organize and execute periodic skills workshops for coaches, players and parents.
- Evaluate practice sessions and provide feedback to coaches to improve the coaching capability of local association coaches.
- Establish and maintain a resource center for coaches, players and parents that would include USA Hockey materials.
- Communicate certification requirements to local association coaches and ensure compliance with USA Hockey & Affiliate certification levels.
- Communicate with the District Associate Coach-In-Chief – ACE, their Affiliate ACE Coordinator, and USA Hockey on all issues related to coaching at the local association level.
- Encourage local association to implement the USA Hockey Skill Development and Cross-Ice programs. Ensure that the local association is promoting age-specific skill development in all of their programs.
- Communicate USA Hockey's Player Development opportunities to players, parents and coaches.
- Deliver Parent Education programs to the local association.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Association Hockey Director and the Local Association

One of the Association Hockey Director's most important jobs is to assist the local association in developing a well-trained coaching staff. One way to accomplish this is to present periodic coaching workshops within the local association. There are many ways to accomplish this. In general the workshops should be tailored to meet the specific needs of your association. Try to take advantage of local "hockey resources" (such as college or pro coaches) as presenters. Some generic guidelines are listed below.

Workshop Facilitator:	Association Hockey Director
Group Leaders:	Association Hockey Director and Associate Head Official
Participants:	Association coaches and local officials
Recommended Length of Workshop:	1.5 hours
Number of Workshops Per Year:	2
Scheduling of Workshops:	1st Workshop – before start of the season  2nd Workshop – mid- season or before tournament play

#### **FIRST WORKSHOP AGENDA**

- Rule changes
- Points of emphasis
- View video on rule changes
- View "Heads Up Hockey" video
- Cover first aid procedure for games
- Discuss coaching bench ethics and officials' game ethics
- Cover proper communication techniques

#### **SECOND WORKSHOP AGENDA**

- Discuss how the season is going and issues/concerns from both officials and coaches
- Discuss any safety problems
- Discuss communication issues
- Special issues surrounding tournaments, playoffs, and the system to be used in educating coaches, players, parents, officials and administrators
- Issues surrounding the play of the games
- Issues surrounding parents
- Recommendations for rule changes, new rules or videos

#### **Other Possible Workshop Topics:**

- < USAH & Affiliate Guide books
- < Introduce and sign coaches code of ethics
- < Core requirements
- < Rules for travel permits
- < Rostering, player movement procedures and deadlines
- < Penalty for abuse of officials
- < Pyramid of development, discussion of other sports
- < Association philosophy; Playing time, practice curriculum, \_ or shared ice, Attendance, tardiness, & discipline matters
- Set ground rules & expectations, duties, responsibilities of head & assistant coaches and team manager.

## **“Heads Up Hockey”**

The “Heads Up Hockey” Program has been developed by USA Hockey’s Safety and Protective Equipment Committee in conjunction with the National Hockey League. The purpose of the program is promote a safer, smarter, better way of playing hockey emphasizing principles of safety, protection and prevention, sportsmanship, teamwork and fun at every level of the game. Your coaches should be aware of this program, and should incorporate it into their practices. Below are some tips to help you accomplishing this.

### **INCORPORATING “HEADS UP HOCKEY” INTO YOUR ASSOCIATION**

Below is a recommended way to incorporate Heads Up Hockey material into your association:

1. Show the “Heads Up Hockey” Challenge Video at the beginning of each season during the:
  - Association Coaches Meetings
  - Parent and Player Orientation Meeting
  - Association Team Meetings
2. At the beginning of each season, plan on incorporating “Heads Up Hockey” into practice sessions. Also, recognize and take advantage of teachable moments.
3. At each of these “Heads Up Hockey” sessions include:
  - 5 minute (maximum) pre-session talk with Q & A
  - 10 minute on-ice drill
4. A total of five “Heads Up Hockey” sessions are suggested.

# Evaluating Coaches and Providing Feedback

The Association Hockey Director position evaluates local association coaches. The Association Hockey Director should review coaching applications and ensure that the coaching philosophy is consistent with USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program philosophy and values. The skills progression for player and coach development is separated into multiple components and should be used as a foundational guide for the Association Hockey Director's evaluation of coaches. The evaluation components include teaching ice hockey in an age-specific progressive manner which include, but are not limited to the following:

- Knowledge of the Game
- Goal Setting
- Individual Hockey Skills
- Team Play
- Nutrition
- Fitness & Training
- Injury Prevention
- Sports Psychology
- Character Development and Life Skills

Other areas for coach evaluation and feedback are:

- Utilization of ice
- Specific drills for goaltenders, defense, forwards
- Evaluation of practice plans
- Setting up and evaluation of off-ice conditioning
- Providing mentoring opportunities in the development of coaches
- Bench management
- Parent education
- Development of players to prepare them for the next level
- Effective education techniques for education of players
- Ethics and Code of Conduct
- Safety
- Players enjoyment of the game

## Establishing and maintaining a resource center for coaches

There are many resources available today for coaches to further their education and to become better hockey coaches. USA Hockey encourages all Association Hockey Directors to establish and maintain a library of these resources for their coaches to use. Some of the available resources are listed below.

## **“Heads Up Hockey”**

To purchase Program Materials go to- Officials Warehouse at [www.usahockeywear.com](http://www.usahockeywear.com) or call 888-806-7337 to order the package of materials.

This packet includes:

- “Heads Up Hockey” Challenge Video
- Coaching Guide
- “Heads Up Hockey” Brochure
- “Heads Up Hockey” Quick Reference Card
- “Heads Up Hockey” Poster

## **ACE DIRECTOR PACKAGE**

For more information and/or to purchase the Association Hockey Director’s package (including videos and publications) contact USA Hockey at 719-576-8724 or visit us on the web: [www.usahockey.com](http://www.usahockey.com)

## **USA Hockey Publications and Videos**

To order official training videos and publications from USA Hockey as well as game score sheets please call 888-806-7337 or visit [www.usahockeywear.com](http://www.usahockeywear.com)

### **Printed Materials**

#### **Hockey Drill Book**

A comprehensive selection of 200 drills that cover all the fundamentals. Including diagrams and descriptions for each drill.

#### **Coaches Planning Book**

New practice planning book.

#### **Level 1 Skill Development Manuals**

Set of five manuals –Including an Instructors guide book along with four handbooks of step-by-step practice plans.

#### **Level 2 Manuals**

Set of three handbooks that cover methods of effective coaching, individual skill techniques and organizing for the season.

#### **Level 3 Manuals**

Featuring chapters on offensive and defensive play, as well as goaltending and sports psychology.

### **The Hockey Coaches Manual**

Complete with step-by-step diagrams, this book helps coaches set up a season-long program and walks them through a host of dryland and on-ice training regimens that will help build team cooperation and enhance individual ability.

### **The Hockey Play Book**

This guide features systems for defensive, offensive and special-teams situations as well as teaching methods and drills, accompanied by more than 500 diagrams.

### **Hockey Drills For Puck Control**

Improve your puck control skills with these 70 ice-tested drills.

### **Introduction to Body Contact**

Teaching proper techniques to safe body contact.

### **Advanced Body Contact**

### **Coaching Youth Hockey**

A great resource for youth hockey coaches and parents working with 6 to 14 year-old athletes. Contains more than 40 practice drills and more than 140 illustrations. Covers ice and in-line hockey.

### **Advanced Body Contact**

### **Coaching For Character**

A valuable tool to help coaches understand the basic principles of sportsmanship. The responsibilities of coaches as models and educators are brought to life through real-life situations that confront them on-and-off the ice.

### **Skill Progression For Player and Coach Development**

Age-appropriate for players. Established coaching education curriculum levels.

### **Half-Ice Drill Book**

A variety of half-ice drills for a wide age range.

### **Practice Plan Manuals**

These materials assist in developing coaches on a progressive hockey curriculum based on fundamental skill development.

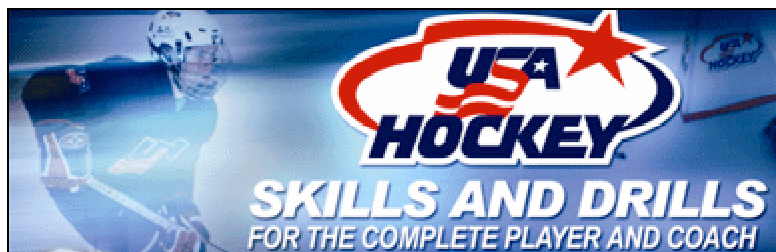
Set of 4 (Mite, Squirt, Peewee, Bantam/Midget)

### **Coaches Journal with Rink Diagrams**

### **Coaches Practice Plan Notepad**

(2 posters)

## **USA Hockey Skills and Drills DVD**



One of USA Hockey's most ambitious projects ever, this DVD-Rom is an encyclopedia of hockey skills, that will help organize practices and teach the sport correctly to players at all age and skill levels.

### **USA Hockey Small Area Competitive Games *Handbook and CD***

This book includes a flexxCOACH CD and is designed to help coaches create drills that emulate game situations.

**Total Hockey Conditioning** – For players and coaches from youth hockey right up to the professional level.

### **flexxcoach Practice Planner**

## **Multimedia**

### **Hockey Parents**

It's up to all of us to make hockey a fun and enjoyable experience for everyone.

### **Challenge Videotape**

Provides useful information to help you and your team play safer, smarter, better hockey.

# **CHAPTER FOUR**

## **CEP and ACE / Certification Requirements**

### **Why is the Association Hockey Director critical to the USA Hockey Coaching Education Program?**

USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program has effectively created an instructional curriculum to provide coaches throughout the country with the training needed to meet the certification requirements for a USA Hockey program. The CEP program does not, however, provide a direct link to the individual coach at the local association level. The Association Hockey Director is designated to provide that critical link for those administrative and coaching functions that will deliver the programs, and implement the objectives, taught in the CEP coaching clinics.

The Association Hockey Director solidifies USA Hockey's commitment to skill development as a primary goal of coaching. The position additionally helps formalize the responsibilities and organizational structure of the coaching program within the local association. The ACE program assists the association in creating and reaffirming roles, responsibilities and performance criteria for their coaches. Finally, the Association Hockey Director provides the essential communication link to the coaches at the local level. This consistent communication about the goals and objectives of USA Hockey will develop better coaches, provide better continuity of coaching skills, and ultimately develop better hockey players.

### **COACHING EDUCATION PROGRAM VISION STATEMENTS**

#### **PURPOSE**

Educating coaches in pursuit of excellence in hockey.

#### **MISSION**

The USA Hockey Coaching Education Program (CEP) is committed to developing coaches who will be effective instructors and role models through a comprehensive education program at all levels.

The Coaching Education Program shall emphasize the teaching of fundamental skills, conceptual development, sportsmanship and respect for the dignity of the individual athlete.

## VALUES

USA Hockey's Coaching Education Program will embrace the following values to establish the moral and ethical priorities that serve to guide the coaching program:

- CHARACTER
- COMMITMENT
- ENJOYMENT
- INTEGRITY
- KNOWLEDGE
- LEADERSHIP
- SPORTSMANSHIP
- VISION

## LEVELS OF THE COACHING EDUCATION PROGRAM

- Level 1
- Level 2
- Level 3
- Level 4
- Level 5 – Master

### **A. Coaching Education Required Levels**

USA Hockey requires that the following set of coaching education levels must be the **minimum criteria**. It must be clearly understood that coaching education requirements must be monitored and enforced by districts or affiliates. All coaches must have the USA Hockey Coaching Education Program card by December 31 of the calendar year.

## USA HOCKEY'S COACHING EDUCATION PROGRAM LEVELS

8-and-Under (Mite)	Level 1
10-and-Under (Squirt)	Level 2
12-and-Under (Pee Wee)	Level 3
14-and-Under (Bantam)	Level 3
16/18-and-Under (Midget)	Level 3
High School	Level 3
Junior C	Level 3
Junior A & B	Level 4
Girls/Women 8 & Under	Level 1 – Skill Development
Girls/Women 10 & Under	Level 1 – Skill Development
Girls/Women 12 & Under	Level 2
Girls/Women 14 & Under	Level 3
Girls/Women 16 & Under	Level 3
Girls/Women 19 & Under	Level 3

### **B. Accreditation**

All coaches (head and assistant) cannot receive accreditation for more than two levels in the USA Hockey Coaching Education Program in one season (May 1 – April 31). A Coaching Education Program card is valid for three seasons at each level. If a coach's card is more than three years from the current calendar year, the card is rendered invalid/expired and a refresher course at the same level or attending a clinic at the next level is necessary for the accreditation to remain current.

### **C. Education and Coaching Prerequisite**

You must attain the CEP levels in order (Level 1 first, Level 2 second, etc.). This requirement must be strictly followed.

#### **D. Evidence of Level**

Proof of coaching education level will be evidenced by a USA Hockey Coaching Education card with appropriate dated verification sticker. This card must be carried by all coaches for all USA Hockey games.

Before the start of each game, and in the presence of the referee, each coach must present their card to one another for verification of coaching education level.

If a coach cannot produce their current and up-to-date USA Hockey Coaching Education card prior to the start of the first period, it must be noted on the official game score sheet and signed by the opposing coach.

#### **E. Continuing Education Requirement**

All coaches shall progress through the Coaching Education Program, attending a coaching clinic at least once every three years until they reach level 3. After a coach has completed level 3, the coach shall do one of the following within 3 years: attend another level 3 clinic, take a USA Hockey continuing education course, complete the USA Hockey Level 3 online recertification, or attend a level 4 clinic. Once a coach has completed the level 4, no additional certification clinics are required.

#### **F. Penalty and Enforcement**

It will be the responsibility of the district/affiliate to determine if there should be any penalties imposed on an individual coach who fails to produce a current, up-to-date coaching education card with appropriate verification of level. It will also be the responsibility of the local program registering the team to enforce any penalties.

# CHAPTER FIVE

## Lines of Communication with USA Hockey

One important reason that USA Hockey created the ACE Program was to establish a direct line of communication between USA Hockey and the local association coaches. Here's how it works. Let's say that a coach has a question about his certification status. He can contact his Association Hockey Director. If his Association Hockey Director cannot answer the question, the Association Hockey Director will contact the Affiliate ACE Coordinator. If the Affiliate ACE Coordinator cannot help, he/she will contact the District Associate Coach-In-Chief –ACE, who in turn can contact the National Associate Coach-In-Chief - ACE. At some point along the chain, the local coach's question will be answered, and/or the problem solved.

This line of communication works both ways. The ACE Program gives USA Hockey a way to reach local association coaches directly with important information. USA Hockey will periodically send information through the ACE Program concerning coaching certification, CEP clinics, or just interesting information regarding coaching hockey. You will also receive the USA Hockey ACE Newsletter.

Youth hockey coaches are the "grassroots" of USA Hockey. The lines of communication established through the creation of the ACE Program are an important part of the success of USA Hockey at the local level.

**USA HOCKEY / NATIONAL ASSOCIATE COACH-IN-CHIEF – ACE**

|

**DISTRICT ASSOCIATE COACH-IN-CHIEF –ACE**

|

**AFFILIATE ACE COORDINATOR**

|

**ASSOCIATION HOCKEY DIRECTOR – ACE**

|

**ASSOCIATION COACH**

# **CHAPTER SIX**

## **USA Hockey Program Implementation**

### **Skill Development Program / Cross-Ice**

One of the responsibilities of the Association Hockey Director is to promote the Skill Development/Cross-Ice Programs. This topic should be discussed at the local ACE Clinics and be promoted throughout your association.

#### **SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM**

##### **BUILDING A FOUNDATION**

The USA Hockey Skill Development Program is designed to meet the needs of the beginning player. Players as young as three years old, to players in their teens can benefit from the program's emphasis on fun and skills. Basic skills will be taught in a non-competitive environment. Fun, physical development, skill acquisitions and teamwork will be stressed. The program enables participants to become contributing members of a team effort; to develop self-confidence; and to experience the sense of personal achievement.

##### **THE GAME IS FUN**

While ice hockey requires a great deal of skill, the proper instruction and attitude make the game fun and rewarding. Coaches should place a primary emphasis on skill development and a de-emphasis on excessive competition and a "win-at-all-costs" attitude at the beginning levels.

The Skill Development Program incorporates the most current and innovative ideas available today. It represents the best methods of starting beginning players on the right path to an enjoyable experience in our sport.

The Skill Development Program lesson plans have been tested and have proven successful in every type of community setting. The established program objectives are:

- To have fun while playing hockey and engaging in physical activity
- To learn the basic skills required to play the game of hockey
- To develop an understanding of basic teamwork through participation in a variety of activities and adapted game situations
- To create and refine basic motor patterns
- To be introduced to the concepts of cooperation and fair play

## **BASIC HOCKEY SKILLS AND MUCH MORE**

USA Hockey's Skill Development Program has four levels of instruction (Books A, B, C and D) designed for beginning hockey players. Each classification represents a different level of skill progression.

At the beginning of the program, players are evaluated according to ability and placed in the appropriate program level.

Each level consists of 20 lesson plans that follow a defined path of progression. As players move through the program, they improve both hockey skills and self-confidence.

The program focuses primarily on the basic hockey skills – skating, stick handling, passing and shooting. Each skill is introduced and refined in a progressive "one-step-at-a-time" manner.

Players participate in practice drills as well as informal and modified games. Players are soon proficient enough to master new skills which keeps the game fun to play.

Although the main emphasis is on fun and progressive skill development, the Skill Development Program also allows youngsters to experience:

- Cooperation
- Fitness
- Fair play
- Safety

## **INSTRUCTORS PLAY AN IMPORTANT ROLE**

Leadership is the key to the Skill Development Program. In addition to developing players' hockey skills and promoting physical fitness, instructors are responsible for encouraging initiative, stimulating interest in the sport and instilling a desire for continued participation. Each instructor is called upon to:

- Be an effective leader and teacher
- Be a model of cooperation and fair play
- Provide a positive, non-competitive atmosphere
- Provide instruction in a way that motivates and challenges
- Develop players' self-respect and self-discipline

## **USA HOCKEY MAKES YOUR SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM EASY**

The overall success of the program relies on the leadership and teaching abilities of the instructors. We've developed an eight-hour instructional clinic designed to ensure that instructors are fully prepared to present a successful program.

USA Hockey has also piloted this program throughout our country and the results have been tremendous. The instructional package consists of six manuals:

- One manual provides the organizational and administrative details of the program
  - One manual explores the special teaching considerations for the specific skill level of the group
  - Four manuals provide the instructor with the step-by-step lesson plans.
- There is one manual for each of the four program levels.

The future of our sport lies within our youth. USA Hockey understands the important role it plays in helping beginning hockey players to develop responsible playing attitudes. A well-run Skill Development Program will foster enjoyment of hockey by our young players and ensure the growth of our sport and your association.

## **Cross-Ice Hockey**

The USA Hockey Cross-Ice program is based on a model of practicing playing hockey across the ice surface as compared to practicing and lengthwise along the full length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations world for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been found that children who begin their hockey training in this environment have outstanding hockey experience.

Parents may ask, "why should my child play cross-ice?" I want my child to play full ice like the professionals do, because I want my child to experience hockey."

To help address these questions, let's think about a child trying to stop a puck while performing a drill from one end of the rink to the other. What is this take? How much energy will this require? Will the player's decision-making skills be enhanced more in the close action of the smaller cross-ice rink or the wide-open area of the full-ice surface? In which situation will the player be more involved in the action?

A recent USA Hockey study shows that in an average 60 minute run

hockey game between 6-8 year old children, the average player had possession of the puck for 20.7 seconds. USA Hockey also completed a very comprehensive study at the 2002 Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in which top National Hockey League and international professional players averaged 85 seconds of puck possession time. In a sixty-minute youth children's game the actual playing time of the game was 20 minutes and 30 seconds. Taking this into consideration, the individual player is only on the ice every third or fourth shift depending on how many players are on the ice resulting in even less ice time. An average of less than 0.5 shots per game for youth players and only 1.5 shots per game for junior and professional players.

The study concluded that:

- For young players in the "full-ice game model" of development, the youngest players would require 180 games and the older youth players would require 80 games to enjoy 60 minutes of actual puck possession time to execute their stick-handling, passing, pass receiving skills.
- Professional and international players would require 60 games to enjoy 60 minutes of puck control skill development.

Many players never touched the puck in the game, especially in youth games.

USA Hockey firmly believes that by giving children the opportunity to participate in the Cross-Ice hockey program, which supports cross-ice practicing and playing, that their enjoyment of hockey as well as their hockey skills are greatly enhanced.

### **Cross-Ice Program**

To help you further understand the benefits of the cross-ice practicing and playing model, some of the advantages are listed below.

#### **PRACTICING**

- The children have more energy with which they can improve when they are skating 85 feet across the ice surface as opposed to the 200 foot length of the ice surface.
- Group sizes become smaller which means learning and teaching become more effective.
- The close feeling of belonging to a team will motivate a child to participate with even greater enthusiasm.
- Drills designed according to the varying skill level of players in a group are easier to organize.

- More puck contact, resulting in improved puck control skills.
- More repetition/frequency in drills in one ice session.
- Decision-making skills are enhanced, as more decisions must be made more frequently at a higher tempo.

## ACTUAL GAME

- Playing on a smaller rink results in increased puck possession for each player.
- Individual technical skills develop more quickly.
- More frequent line changes in the game means more ice time for each player.
- Line changes are made quickly since the players are directly on the playing surface.
- Each player's activity increases greatly.
- Scoring skills are enhanced since the players have more shooting opportunities.
- The goalkeeper's reading of the game and reaction to changing situations become more effective.
- More repetition for goalkeepers.
- The game is full of continuously changing situations.
- The speed in playing situations increases, which will require quick mental and physical reactions by the players.
- Due to increased tempo, all of the team members take part in the playing situations, which leads to a sharing of responsibility between players.
- The feeling of being an important part of the action increases due to the small size of the rink.
- Hockey sense, or understanding the principles of the game, is developed at a young age.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game (i.e. off-sides,

## GENERAL ORGANIZATION

- More efficient use of ice time and space.
- The size of the rink is in proportion with the size of the players.
- USA Hockey recommends that teams play with two or three or five players and one goalkeeper, which results in each player getting more ice time.
- More ice time for practicing and playing is made available to players within a single association.
- Many teams can practice together by sharing the ice surface.

## GENERAL SPIRIT OF PARTICIPATION AND FUN

- More children get a chance to play ice hockey.
- More children will experience a feeling of success when playing.
- The same exciting and fun environment as in a "real" game.
- More and less gifted children will benefit from close/tight action on the ice.
- Children are excited and motivated to continue playing hockey.
- Hockey will be more appealing and rewarding to a wider range of children and their parents.

# Player Development Program

The Association Hockey Director is involved in player development at all levels. Their first priority is to promote skill development within their association. They are also involved in choosing, educating, and coaching coaches, which has a dramatic impact on all players. The Association Director also acts as their association's liaison with the USA Hockey Development Program. They are charged with the task of working with associations' coaches to identify players capable of playing on the national stage. The following is a brief description of the Player Development and Select Camps.

## USA Hockey Player Development

Each summer USA Hockey conducts Select Player Development Camps for elite athletes from throughout the country. The athletes are chosen from tryouts within USA Hockey Districts, with some slots reserved for at-large selections. The purpose is to attract the best players, in their specific age group, to our national program.

The purpose of the Camps is to identify, train, educate and evaluate our best players. Individuals are selected by Districts to compete in the week-long event. During the week, players are evaluated by our national scouting program, college and professional scouts and recruiters. The competition gives each player the chance to measure themselves against others his/her age, gain knowledge about his/her development and to be exposed to outstanding coaching. At times, teams from certain Camps are invited to participate in international competition.

The program is not a tryout for our National Team Development Program in Lake Placid, New York. By the same token, our national staff does not take part by testing our players physically and mentally, conducting lectures and evaluating their ability. The format of each program creates a very competitive atmosphere. This is the setting with which athletes will compete at their highest level. It is not a grueling week of training and competition meant to showcase our players; rather, it is essential that all participants, particularly staff, understand that while they

recommended by their district, they are part of the USA Hockey National Development Program while at the camps. Rules that have been put in place followed and all must work together for a successful program.

## Parent Awareness Program

### **Building Strong Hockey Communities: ACE's Leadership in Parent Education**

The youth hockey team has three essential groups of personnel – it begins with the athletes, is educated and led by coaches, and is supported by parents. USA Hockey and its districts/affiliates do an excellent job at educating coaches, who in turn mentor and teach athletes. Currently parent education is occasional at best and more often than not, parents are left out of the educational loop. Mothers and fathers are left to navigating the complex world of youth sports often without expert and ethical guidance. Consequently, parents are left to be labeled “problems,” rather than being coached to play their important role of foundations for excellent athletic accomplishments. Without family education and positive parental participation hockey communities are unable to fulfill their optimal potential (i.e. participation, perseverance, fun and player development).

Association Hockey Directors around the country are in the unique position to provide credible information and education to hockey parents in their communities and local associations. While this might seem like an overwhelming task, the ACE program has designed a comprehensive and user-friendly approach to hockey parent education. Association Hockey Directors have two key responsibilities during this process: 1) directly educate parents through community discussions and information dissemination and 2) educate and empower coaches to conduct effective parent meetings.

### **Association Hockey Director and Community Education**

With strong leadership from the District Associate Coach-In-Chief and a little effort from local hockey programs, parents of 8 and under (mites) to 18 and

under (midgets) can be empowered to make good decisions at the rink. Optimal parent education takes a triadic approach to building positive parent behaviors: 1) Education, 2) Behavioral Contracting, and 3) Awareness/Message Reinforcement.

### **Education:**

Often parents display more anxiety than their kids throughout the youth sport experience. Much of this stems from the intense emotions they feel toward their child and their child's well-being. There are certainly great desires to be able to provide the "right" opportunities for their child, yet knowing what is "right" can be a great challenge. Without guidance, adults often treat youth sports as an adult enterprise, failing to make modifications because children are involved rather than adults. Therefore they behave as if they were at NHL games rather than youth sporting events. At a NHL game, big hits and fights are often seen as entertainment, playing through significant injuries are signs of courage, heckling the officials is a favorite American pastime, and success is measured by the box score (i.e. goals, +/-, assists, and saves = success). Not only are all of these perspectives unhealthy in a youth sports setting, but they also inhibit athletes' abilities to develop optimally as hockey players and as citizens.

The USA Hockey Parent Education presentation addresses these sentiments. It is important during the education of parents to remind them of why kids participate, enjoy and thrive in youth sports: to have fun, to learn new skills, and to hang out with friends. It is equally important to share with adults "how" to create optimal youth sports environments. In essence, what are the actions of optimal hockey parenting?

The actions can be separated into three phases: 1) preparing to play - i.e. encourage support of teammates, coaches and officials, check equipment with your child before leaving the house, and say, "Have fun!"; 2) game/practice-time behaviors - support all participants in the game, reinforce effort and attitude in our language (i.e. say, 'good work,' 'way to communicate,' 'nice pass.'), have only positive things to say at the rink; 3) Conversation for the ride home - discussing the process of hockey rather than the outcome and focusing on enjoyment and positive memories. Lastly, the USA Hockey Coaching Education Program discusses the coach-parent relationship and adult roles at youth hockey games. Ultimately, parent education should create a common philosophy and language that can be shared by parents, coaches, and administrators throughout the season.

### **Behavioral Contracting:**

The second step in the commitment by a local community to develop optimal youth hockey environments is sharing USA Hockey's Code of Conduct. This is done by asking all adults to read and sign a code of conduct. The code not only reinforces the USA hockey parent education message, but also, much like a post-game handshake, is an important symbol of commitment to the lessons learned in sports that extend beyond the playing field. The USA Hockey Parent Code of Conduct builds off of the basic principles of positive youth sport environments.

### **Awareness/Message Reinforcement:**

Even the best educational messages fail to thrive if they are not reinforced regularly. This concept is highlighted by NHL players practicing skills as simple as passing and skating throughout the season. While these are skills that were mastered a long time ago, if they are not practiced, their quality will diminish as time goes by. The messages of the parental education presentations and behavioral contracts can be reinforced daily by items such as the "Relax It's Just a Game" posters and public service announcements and the "Zero Tolerance" posters. By having these messages in every rink and available on hockey program websites, parents are regularly reminded of the concepts that make hockey a great learning environment for youth. Parents spend a great deal of time sitting in rinks drinking hot coffee and waiting for the action to begin. If facilities are outfitted with posters and informational brochures (such as USA Hockey's Parent's Introduction to Youth Hockey) parents will pass the time reading them and being reminded of the educational message. Increasing awareness is at the heart of long - term behavioral change.

Association Hockey Directors are in the unique position to be able to begin the parental education process in associations around the country. Association Hockey Directors should familiarize themselves with all of the materials previously mentioned. They have been designed to be both educationally sound and simple to use.

For a copy of the USA Hockey/ACE Parent Education presentation and supporting materials, contact USA Hockey.

### **The Parent Meeting: Empowering Coaches, the Foundation to a Successful Season**

Most parents will be actively involved in their child's youth sport activities. Pre-season parent meetings are essential for coaches to choose how parents are involved in their children's hockey throughout the season. Taking an opportunity to formally address parents improves communication between coach and parents, heightening a coach's ability to be successful during the season and, ultimately, leaving greater potential for an enjoyable coaching experience.

While this importance of good communication between parents and athletes is obvious, it is important to appreciate that holding a parent meeting can be a daunting task. It is fair to assume that a volunteer, non-professional coach might have some anxiety when standing before his/her peers to tell them their coaching philosophies, how parents ought to act in and around the rink, and to ask for them to trust them with their kids. Although these are very real concerns, they must be overcome in order to create an optimal youth sport environment. Prior to holding a parent meeting, a coach should take some time to organize a clear agenda and be prepared to speak with confidence.

A parent meeting is designed to provide the coach a forum to review the key topics for the team for the season both on and off the ice. It is the opportunity for the coach to discuss candidly with the parents their role and responsibilities as part of the team. The parents need to be reminded or educated on the importance balance of sports and home life, the responsibilities and acceptance of discipline, the manner in which they can effectively interface with the coach in the course of his or her role as the coach and the responsibilities of the players to the team and their teammates.

The parent meeting provides a coach the opportunity to discuss the philosophies and objectives and what the expectations and outcomes should be for the player and the team for the year. Additionally, it is the opportunity to let the parent know how to measure progress and success and what accountabilities the coach has in that definition of success. Finally, it gives the coach the time to let the parents know that he or she will be a good steward and role model in their child's development, enjoyment and safety. Hockey is a game, that when managed correctly can be a tremendous life experience development tool for the player. The coach wants both him or herself and the parents with the same agenda concerning the welfare of the player. The only way to do that is to communicate and the only way to communicate is to meet. Effective communication at the beginning of the season is excellent prevention for minimizing inappropriate parental behaviors in at the practices and games.

A parent meeting should be well-planned and user-friendly enough to accommodate both novice coaches and coaches with many years of experience. The tendency in planning a meeting will be to attempt to cover too much information. The question to consider is not, "How much would I like to share with the parents?" but rather, "How much would I like them to learn?" The following are some elements that should be included in a pre-season parent meeting:

#### Explain the Objectives of Youth Hockey

- Fun
- Skill Development
- Socialization
- Safety
- Participation/a life-long passion for hockey

#### Information About "This" Program

- Playing time
- Attendance expectations
- Rules and regulations
- Code of conduct
- Cuts
- 24- hour rule for discussing concerns (never at the rink)

#### Introduce Your Style of Coaching

- Positive approach
- What can parents expect – vocal, quiet, always encouraging
- Encourage parental reinforcement and support

#### Recruit Positive Parental Involvement

- Define roles
- Introduce the code of conduct
- Highlight game time responsibilities
  - Support players
  - Model behaviors

These are essential elements that ought to be considered and prepared for well in advance of hosting a parents meeting. If all of these issues are addressed in a clear, concise and confident manner, a strong foundation for successful communication will be established. The following is a sample agenda that can be adopted, and modified if necessary, for coaches in preparing for a preseason meeting.

## Parent Meeting – Sample Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Basics of Hockey
3. Injury Prevention/Management
4. Equipment Needs
5. Program Goals
6. Child's Responsibilities
7. Parent's Responsibilities
8. Schedule for Season
9. Team Policies and Rules
10. Closing Remarks

USA Hockey is a leader in youth sport coach education. Through ACE initiatives USA Hockey also has the potential to serve as a leader of youth sport parent education. Coaches, parents, and athletes are the most critical youth hockey team. ACE's parent education enhances communication, education and awareness, ultimately empowering coaches to teach effectively, and even more important allowing athletes the opportunity to reach their potential.