

Cross-Ice Skill Development Program

Overview of Program

The mission statement for USA Hockey's youth programs is to provide an innovative grassroots foundation for the growth and development of USA Hockey, designing programs aimed at increased participation, improved skills and a responsible environment for the conduct of youth hockey.

USA Hockey has created four distinct categories within its structure to help meet the needs of the youth player: initiation (skill development), recreational, competitive and select.

We encourage programs to incorporate Cross-Ice hockey for young players.

The Initiation Program was renamed the Skill Development Program and now includes the Cross-Ice curriculum. The combination of these two programs places appropriate emphasis on skill development for each individual player in an efficient, age appropriate manner. By establishing a solid skill base, while keeping the travel and participant cost under control.

As a result of these programs, many associations and leagues around the country have replaced their full-ice 8 & under and 10 & under programs with Cross-Ice programs. A PowerPoint presentation and brief video are available to exhibit the objectives and philosophies of the 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 their skills when they are skating 85 feet across the ice surface as opposed to the 200 feet length of the ice surface.
- Group sizes become smaller which means learning and teaching will 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 within the 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 time 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 beside 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 game situations become more effective.
- More repetition for goalkeepers.
- The game is full of continuously changing situations.
- The speed in playing situations increase, which will require quicker mental and physical reactions by the players.
- Due to increased tempo, all of the team members take part in solving the playing situations, which leads to a sharing of responsibilities between players.
- The feeling of being an important part of the action increases because of the small size of the rink.
- Hockey sense, or understanding the principles of the game, is being developed at a young age.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game (i.e. off-sides, icing).

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 units of four or five players and one goalkeeper, which results in each player having more ice time.
- More ice time for practicing and playing is made available to more teams 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 hockey.
- The same exciting and fun environment as in a "real" game is created.
- 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.