

The Player Development Committee for Wayzata Youth Hockey is charged with designing and implementing the best programs for all of our players. The committee relies on not only their own experience (which is extensive) but on the many resources available in Minnesota Hockey, USA Hockey, and the International Ice Hockey Federation.

There has been much discussion over the years as to why so few US born players are able to compete at the elite levels of hockey. In Canada and the United States there have been numerous task forces to study the issues related to the development of highly skilled players. The dramatic increase in the numbers of European players that are playing at the elite level over the past two decades sent inquiring minds to Europe to study their techniques of player development.

The results of these numerous studies has lead to some consensus opinions and are supported by research here in the USA.

- In Europe, competitive league play begins at age 14. In North America we lose 10,000 players each year who drop out of hockey after Peewees.
- The focus in Europe is skill development through the use of low intensity small area games and practices. These are not “Travel Teams” as we know them. The emphasis is on skill development and fun.
- The concept that the more games a player plays the better he/she will become is just not true. We currently have players in our system that are playing over 120 games per year. The evidence, in fact, points to the opposite result being achieved.
- Although players are now bigger, stronger and faster than 20 years ago, they lack the basic understanding of the read and react nature of the game. This has occurred because kids actually spend, on average, 50% less time on the ice during the season than players who grew up prior to 1980.
- The lack of time on the ice and the significantly reduced opportunity for players to develop their skills is a direct result of our culture and our obsession with winning championships before age 12.

The solution to the problems are well documented. We must provide a low stress, age specific development program that allows all of our players the opportunity to develop their skills in an environment that is fun. The cross Ice/small Area games format accomplishes all of the objectives.

- Young players are playing in spaces that are suited to their size and abilities. All players all get to participate in the play and handle the puck more often. Smaller goals and pucks allow the players to develop skills with equipment they can handle.
- Combining the Initiation Program format with the Cross Ice format players will develop individual skills at a faster rate.

Attached is an article from Paul Cannata, Coach of the USA Under 16 National Team. It addresses the issues very well. Please take a few minutes to read through it.

The other information was compiled at the Tier 1 Bantam and Peeewe National Championships held in Colorado Springs this past April. The charts detail the time of possession for top players selected from each team listed. The average Bantam player skates 18 minutes per game and has the puck on his stick an average of 1.06 minutes. The average Peeewe plays 16 minutes per game with an average of 38 seconds of puck possession. Remember, these are the top players in the country. These statistics support the idea that players need to practice more and play less games if they want to improve.

By changing to small area games for our youngest players, they will significantly increase the amount of time they are on the ice and they will significantly increase the opportunities to handle the puck. This will increase their enjoyment of the game and will lead to better skilled players. Small area games are now being used by our upper level travel teams

We need only to look to the soccer world to see that they have already determined that young players are best served and developed by decreasing the size of the field and revising the format of play. Instead of full sized 11v11 the under 12 players are now playing on smaller fields 8v8 and next year 6v6. The youngest players (midget equivalent) play on very small fields 4v4 with no goalies.

The Player Development Committee is very sincere in our desire to develop the best skilled players possible. It all begins at mites. This is where the foundation of skill development occurs.