



SHOULD MY DAUGHTER PLAY FOR A GIRLS' TEAM OR A BOYS' TEAM?

There are a lot of options to consider when making this decision. The answer is not black and white and it is different for every player.

A hot topic for hockey directors, administrators, coaches, parents, and players is the placement of female players. Should girls play girls hockey or boys hockey and if they play on a boys team at what age should they transition to an all-girls team?

CONSIDERATIONS

- What is your daughter's preference?
- In which atmosphere will your daughter thrive both athletically and socially and as a result, have the most fun playing the game?
- What program has a better coaching and player developmental philosophy?
- Is the head coach following the American Development Model, which is based on age and gender-appropriate athlete development principles?
- What is the practice-to-game ratio and does the coach utilize practice ice time well?
- Which program will continually challenge and allow your daughter to improve?
- Is the appropriate amount of time being allocated to skill, sense, and systems training?
- Are the coaches aware of the sensitive windows of trainability?
- Is your daughter being introduced to fundamental aspects of strength and conditioning regimens?
- How are the coaches' motivational and communication skills?
- What are the financial costs and how far do you have to travel to practices and games?
- Overall is the coach focused on developing players or just winning youth games and championships?

BENEFITS OF PLAYING ON A BOYS TEAM

Low Female Registration Numbers: In the 2011-12 season, approximately 50,000 girls between the ages of 8U and 18U registered with USA Hockey. That number is only about 17% of the total number of boys between the same ages that also registered in that season. In addition, some areas of the country have a higher number of girls players than others and are able to create age-appropriate all-girls teams. You may live in an area where this is not the case and playing on an age-appropriate boys team may help avoid issues that can accompany teams composed of players of varying ages, such as wide gaps in skill and overall player development that can sometimes lead to frustrating situations for your daughter.

Distance to Practice: The only option to play on a girls' team may mean you have to drive further to get her to practices.



More Options in Coaching and Player Development Philosophy: Playing on a boys' team usually means you have a minimum of two age-appropriate team options to pick from in your local area. You can pick a team that has a coaching style and player development philosophy that better fits your daughter's needs.

Local Competition: Because there are a higher number of boys' teams, there is access to more local competition, both intrastate or in neighboring states.

Depth: The level of play may be better because of sheer numbers meaning more competitive practices and leagues.

Physiological Capabilities: One important aspect to remember is that there are very few physiological differences between boys and girls ages 0-12. If anything, girls are a little more coordinated at these young ages. Girls also hit puberty, on average, two years before boys so they will be slightly taller and stronger than the average boy.

BENEFITS OF PLAYING ON A GIRLS TEAM

Female Peers: Playing with female peers may be important for many young girls to feel like they fit in. They may have fewer self-esteem issues playing with their peers than with boys who may tease them. USA Hockey's most recent growth and retention studies found 54% of 8U girls players quit the game before they progress to the 10U level. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that girls are social beings - they may play on all-girls team because they want to play with their friends or sisters or because the boys may intimidate them.

Focus on Female Needs: All-female teams and associations will have hockey directors, managers and coaches focused on the specific needs of a female player.

Female Coaches: Associations with all-girls teams more often than not actively recruit female coaches. Some girls might feel more comfortable with a female coach and there are very few boys' teams that have women as head coaches.

Female Student Coaches: Many times, associations with all-girls teams have access to female student coaches - often they are former players from the club who played in college or older girls still in the club. It can be very empowering for a young girl to see 16U and 19U female players compete in practice and games or have former collegiate players assist in their development.

Exposure: In associations with all-girls teams, the women's game at the higher level will be visible to the younger female players and will give them a clear sense of what they can achieve.

Mentorship Programs: There is opportunity to create mentorship or big sister programs with local women's collegiate teams or senior women's teams within your association. Within the club, team pairings can be made for mentorship and support purposes. For example, matching teams can be set up as follows: 19U & 12U, 16U & 10U, and 14U and 8U.

Leadership: Very few girls that play on boys' teams get the opportunity to be a leader or a captain.

Playing Time/Development: Unfortunately some coaches on the boys' side will not play girls equally, or if the girl is not as talented, she will not get the playing time and coaching needed to develop.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

While the female game grows in the United States, it is important to offer opportunities for girls to play on all-girls teams as well as allow them to play on a boys' team if they so choose. The following is from an article published by the Women's Sports Foundation and is available on their website. It offers supplemental information about girls playing on boys' teams. Below are some highlights:

1. Allowing girls the right to compete on the boys' teams does not have an adverse impact on girls' teams. Athletics is not a zero-sum environment where the participation of one girl on the boys' team comes at the expense of a loss of participation on the girls' team. Opening boys' teams to girls should not be viewed as a loss of participation for the girls' teams, but a broadening of opportunities for girls to compete that will only serve to expand the participation and growth of girls in sports.
2. Just as female participation in sport expanded when Title IX opened the doors of opportunity for competition by creating teams for girls, opening the door to boys' teams will also help expand opportunities for girls to compete. As one court noted, denying girls this choice actually works to restrict girls' participation because it denies them the right to choose which particular competition is most appropriate for their ability.
3. Offering competition with the boys provides girls with a different type of competitive experience that could increase overall participation by drawing girls into sport who previously chose to remain on the sidelines because they did not want to participate on sex-segregated teams. Furthermore, to the extent that girls from all-girls teams choose to compete with boys, overall participation for girls will increase because it opens slots on female teams that girls not currently participating in sports can then fill.
4. Prior to puberty, females and males should compete with and against each other on coeducational teams. Prior to puberty, there is no gender-based physiological reason to separate females and males in sports competition. In fact, research demonstrates that girls who participate with boys in youth sports are more resilient. Competition groupings should be organized around skill and experience. Girls and boys possessing similar skills should be playing with each other and against teams consisting of boys and girls who are similarly skilled.
5. To read the entire article visit <http://bit.ly/Qs9TQc>

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