

Welcome to the River Falls/Blackhawk Youth Hockey Girls Program!

On Behalf of the Girls communication committee, we would like to welcome all the girl players and parents to the 2020-2021 hockey season. In an effort to continue to keep good communication within the Blackcats program we have a communication committee that was established in 2019 and is made up of 3 representatives from each association. Members of the committee are Jody Christensen, Neil Accola, Gina Rens, Aaron Van Ranst, Mike DeLong, and Bobbi Stanley. The committee has been meeting regularly over the last 18-months in an effort to put together informational pieces so our members are more informed. Our goal is to send out periodic e-mails throughout the season as information and updates are needed. This e-mail will talk about the history of the program, team levels for 2020-21 season, and important season information and key season dates.

Blackcats History/Philosophy

Program Management: We have a Girls Coaching Committee of several individuals (Current Girls ACE Coordinator/ HS Head Coach Matt Cranston, HS Assistant Coach Jon Zevenbergen, long time coach/ girls coordinator/ BHA Board Member Mike DeLong, Longtime coach/UWRF Alumni Jodi Volgren) that have been with the program for many years; some from its inception, making decisions on the future of the program. Longtime RF youth and new youth girls coach Russ Swanson will be joining this veteran group of coaches and mentors. All members are hockey people that have played and been developed through various youth hockey programs.

We follow USA Hockey ADM Models very closely and are fortunate to have many highly qualified hockey people involved in our program. We are now getting girls who developed through our program as coaches – part of our long-term planning. We would love to have many of our past players raising their own families in our program and coaching with the long-term knowledge of our systems. **All decisions on the program are discussed and worked out between this management team before any implementation.** We have the ultimate goal of building strong players for our high school program. We are not as concerned about winning at the youth levels, but when you run the program well, wins do come. We are currently the largest girl's hockey association in terms of player numbers in the state of Wisconsin. In terms of the Co-Ops in the State of Wisconsin, we are also one of the smallest in terms of population demographics. We are doing a lot of things right in both Associations to bring in solid numbers for the girls' program. With this growth, we are experiencing new opportunities and challenges.

General Development Philosophy: First and foremost, we want to provide a fun, safe, and healthy environment for players to develop. We want to develop all players at all skill levels and allow all girls to have a place to play in an environment where they can be successful in their own development. For many years, we had all skill levels on the same team, as we only had one team at each level. Now with our numbers being stronger and WAHA making changes to have multiple levels at the state program, we now have a team in each of the U12 A & B Levels. U10 teams will remain as an equal split between the because of the need for general hockey knowledge and our strong focus on skill development at this level. In 2020-2021, the plan is to have A & B Levels at all levels in Wisconsin state competition. In Minnesota, this has been the model since the beginning, we are just getting there. While there are multiple levels for State competition, there are not Wisconsin leagues to play in so we try to find like competition as best we can.

Building Skills: We believe in teaching kids to skate well and handle the puck with speed in a progressive development system. We want U10 skaters to have certain skills before they get to U12, etc. At the U12 & U14 levels, we continue to build skating & puck handling skills, but there is a lot more team strategy included in practices. We want our skaters to think and make decisions by themselves to build a high hockey IQ, which is why we do so much in small area game development. The brain is just as important as skills. We have produced many less skilled players that had a high hockey IQ and therefore knew where things were going before they happened, and because of that, still had a successful hockey career. We highly believe in puck possession and teaching kids to share the puck. Teaching kids to be comfortable holding the puck and making good decisions is paramount in everything we do. We want highly motivated and skilled players to have the ability to work with other like-minded players and those that are more recreational to have that ability as well.

Minnesota League Play: We set our teams into leagues in which we hope they can be successful. Because of the difference in ages between Wisconsin and Minnesota, that typically means our teams will play at the B Level in Minnesota at the U10 & U12 Levels. Having 2 teams at each the U10 & U12 levels can produce challenges as our top team is still a B Level Minnesota Team. As in previous years, MN District 2 will be offering a U12 B2 league where our B team will play, providing the competition that is a good fit. Minnesota level U12 A is a very highly skilled league that is not a good match for our teams. At the U14 level, we typically play in the A environment. In Minnesota, they have a U15 and not a U14 level which has been challenging to stay competitive, but our teams are doing their best. The U15 B League is growing and may be a better fit in the future. We base our decisions on the talent level we have and which levels we believe will be a good fit for our teams.

2019-2020 Girls Levels

U10 – WI A/ MN B

U12 – WI A/ MN B1 and WI B/ MN B2

U14 – WI A/ MN U15A

Practices

Practices are typically 2 days/ week for U10 and 3 days/ week for U12 & U14. Days of the week can vary due to when HS practices start and when they have games. HS season starts in November. The first couple of weeks of practices are typically in Baldwin. This evens out throughout the season. We may see a higher number of practices at Hunt Arena this season with a split practice schedule between teams.

Key Dates

- Sunday Sept 29 starting at 6:00pm at Baldwin – Girls program meet and greet pre-season gathering. All Blackcats girls and parents are invited to a get to know each other pizza gathering.
Please RSVP through the following link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/VKB8ZGK>
- Girls Hockey Weekend Oct 5: 11:30 to 12:30 at RF. Celebration of girls hockey across the nation with UWRF, Fusion, Blackcats players along with anyone interested in girls hockey.
- Week of Oct 7: Practices Start at Baldwin
- Week of Oct 21-25: U12 Tryouts time and days TBD at River Falls
- Nov 22-24: U10/U12 Home Tournament in River Falls (Revised DATE 8/2020)
- Dec 6-8: U14 Home Tournament in River Falls (Revised DATE 8/2020)
- Dec 13-15: U10/12 Home Tournament in Baldwin
- Jan 17-19: U14 Home Tournament in Baldwin
- Jan 31-Feb 2: WI State Playoffs

Welcome and thank you for being involved with Blackcats girls hockey!

Girls Communication Committee

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