

Goals & Objectives

The goals and objectives of hockey programming are to:

- Teach all the basic skills of hockey so players can enjoy the game,
- Assist in the development and enhancement of physical literacy and basic motor patterns,
- Develop and encourage the concepts of being a team member through player participation in both on-ice and off-ice activities,
- Encourage the aspects of fitness, fair play and cooperation while having fun playing the game.

Program Philosophy

The U9 program focuses on a 'Developing Skills First' approach for young hockey players:

- Hockey Canada developed the program to ensure that the child's early experience with hockey is delivered in a safe and positive environment.
- The program enables participants to become contributing members of a team effort, develop self-confidence, and experience a sense of personal achievement.

Program Goals

- To have fun while playing hockey and engaging in physical activity.
- To learn the fundamental skills required to play the game of hockey.
- To develop and refine the basic motor patterns.
- To be introduced to the concepts of cooperation and fair play.

Program Delivery

Hockey Northwestern Ontario only permits mixed age programming (7 and 8-year-old players on the same team) within U9 hockey.

Associations running mixed age programming will:

- Deliver half ice programming for the **full year** to players 7 and 8 years of age.
- All Minor Hockey Associations must run half ice programming for the **full season**.
- Practices will be station based.

Why was Modified Game Play (Cross and Half ice) implemented?

The initiation program (age six and under) made this transition during the 2016-17 season and Hockey Canada has mandated this change for player eight years of age and younger effective the 2019-2020. HNO along with many other jurisdictions have made the changes effective

2018-19 season.

Modified game play was implemented to teach the FUNdamental skills of hockey in a safe and stress-free environment so the players can enjoy the game. By moving to modified game play; direction changes, puck touches, pass attempts and puck battles are doubled and shots per player are six (6) times higher for each player compared to full ice games.

An illustration of very simple statistics illustrates highlight the advantages to the smaller surface games model.



Small spaces equate to more engaged in the play:

- All players are close to the play at all times and have much more opportunity for puck touches. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, their opportunities to be engaged in the play are doubled when the playing area is smaller.



A very large difference between full ice and small areas:

- There are 6 times as many shots on goal or at goal in a cross-ice or half-ice game.
- Players are closer to the puck at all times and the puck finds its way to the net much more often



Shrinking the playing surface increases offence:

- Players are much closer to the nets, skate shorter distance from goal to goal, and have increased opportunities for offensive play.



More of a team game is apparent:

- In the smaller area games, players are observed passing and attempting to pass the puck more often. This is for two reasons:
 - All players are close enough to pressure the puck more frequently
 - Teammates are in close support of the puck carry at all times



Short quick passes find their mark:

- In smaller spaces, more passes are attempted and most of these passes are 5 to 10 feet in length.
- When passes are shorter, accuracy improves, and players tend to have more success receiving the pass.
- Players also start to understand the important of team puck possession.

Seven- & Eight-Year Old's

Players seven (7) or eight (8) years of age as of December 31 of the current season may only be registered to and play for a U9 Team.

Non-Sanctioned Programs

As per Hockey Canada policy regarding non-sanctioned leagues:

- I. Any individual who participates in a non-sanctioned league after September 30th of the current playing season will lose all privileges with Hockey Canada for the remainder of that season.
- II. The individual who participates will be eligible to return to Hockey Canada sanctioned programming in the following season.
- III. The consequences described in number 1 will remain in effect even if the non-sanctioned league folds, the team folds, or the participant is released or stops participating after September 30th.

Team Size

- I. The ideal team size for a U9 team is eighteen players, which permits four lines for 4on4 hockey including two goaltenders.
 - a. In most situations, that means a player is on the ice every other shift and that is where the focus should be- keeping kids on the ice as much as possible.
 - b. Smaller associations may not be able to achieve this requirement. We recommend a minimum of nine players on a team to permit 4on4 hockey with two lines and one goalie.
 - i. If your minor hockey association is unable to achieve this recommendation, they are asked to contact HNO for further support on rostering a team.

Affiliation to U11

Affiliation to U11 from U9 programming is not permitted.

Training Requirements for Coaches and Bench Staff

- I. Only coaches and bench staff (team personnel) that are in the Hockey Canada Registry are permitted behind the bench or on the ice for team activities.
- II. Respect in Sport activity leader program certification is required for all registered team personnel.
- III. Gender Identity and Expression course is required for all registered team personnel.
- IV. All U9 coaches must have Coach 1-Intro to Coach training. *(Note if you have Coach 2, Development 1, or High Performance 1, you are still required to obtain Coach 1 to coach U9 hockey).*
- V. Teams must have one bench staff registered as the team safety person and certified as a level one (1) safety person. Teams will only be permitted to register a maximum of one person as a safety person. Coaches may also obtain the safety person certification in addition to the safety person.
- VI. Teams will be permitted to register a maximum of one person as a manager.

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Proper training is extremely important for those parents and volunteers who will be introducing the Minor Hockey system to children. This training will help to ensure that the proper skills are taught to this age group based on Hockey Canada's Long-Term Player Development model. Training emphasizes the dedication and commitment required to run a successful U9 hockey program.

Ice Dimensions

- I. The half ice playing surface can be a maximum of 100 feet by 85 feet if the divides are placed at the center red line.
- II. In a study conducted by Hockey Alberta, the half-ice playing surface illustrated the same stride distance for a child as relative to the full sheet of ice for an adult.
- III. The rink dimensions of arenas in Northwestern Ontario can be found on the HNO website under the U9 tab and in the resource section of this policy.

Game Play Model

- I. The Game Play model is referred to as the Two Team Game Play Model (see figure 3). This model is built on two teams playing one another in two halves.
- II. Each U9 team is divided into two units.
- III. Each team is required to dress two goaltenders, one for each half game.

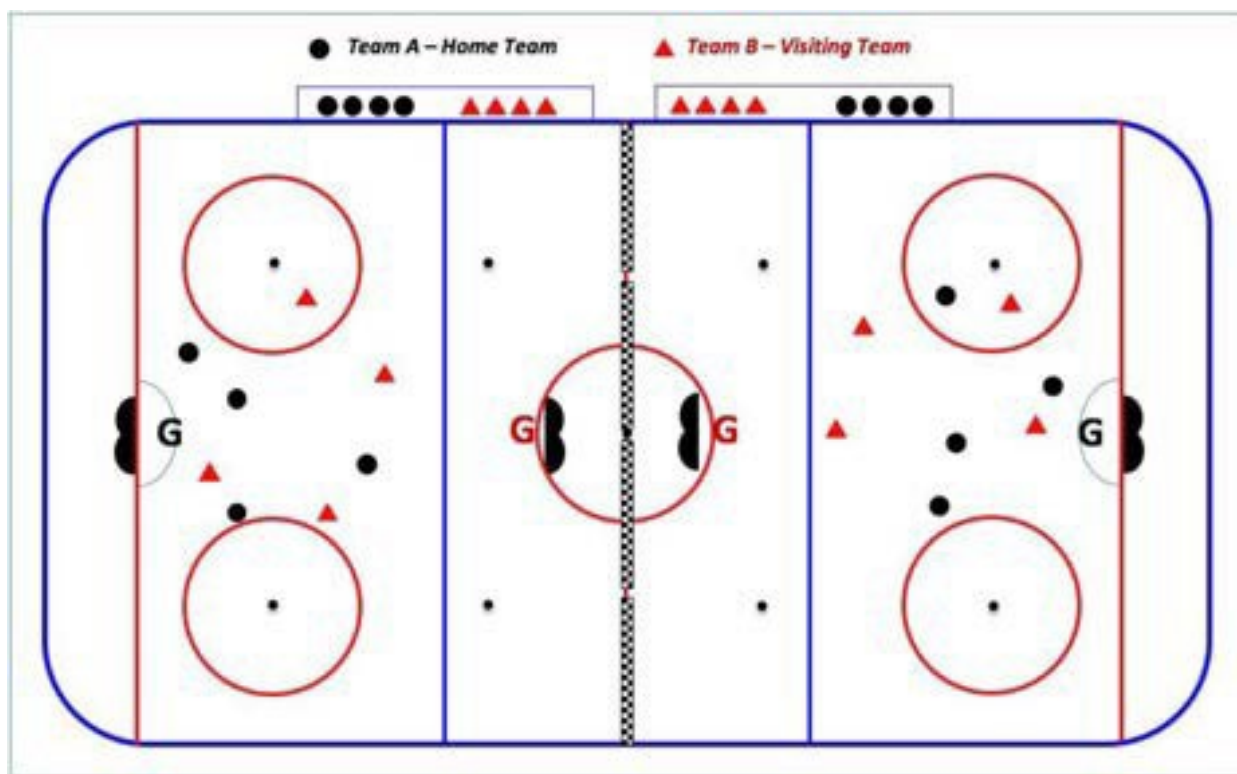


FIGURE 3: Two Team – Two Half Ice Game Model

- IV. In some minor hockey communities, team composition may be much smaller. If this is the case, the ice is still divided in two halves, but only one half will be used for game play. The other half of the ice can be used as practice surface for a third team. (See figure 4).
- V. In the two team, two half ice games model, each team will consist of up to 18 players divided into two units of 9 players. Each team unit will have one goaltender and eight skaters.
 - a. Smaller numbers will allow for players to double shift to ensure there are always four players on the ice. Coaches must make sure all players take turns double shifting.
- VI. Game length is 40 minutes (2 x 20-minute halves) plus a 3-minute warm-up.
- VII. In each half of the ice, the centre spot should be marked to indicate where face-off will take place. This mark is to be established at the midpoint between both nets.
 - a. A marker or bingo marker could be used to mark the centre spot.
- VIII. When play is stopped due to the goaltender freezing the puck or a goal being scored, the referee will signal the attacking players to back off three meters. Once the attackers have moved back, the players may resume play as soon as the possession team has the puck. In the event a puck goes out of play (over divider or glass), the referee will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and the offending team will be required to provide a 3-metre cushion.
- IX. Incidental contact may happen, but body checking is not permitted.
- X. There is no centre ice (red) line and therefore no icing.

- XI. There are no blue lines in the play, therefore no offsides.
- XII. The home team shall defend the two (2) ends of the rink, while the visiting team shall defend the centre ice nets.
- XIII. When the buzzer sounds to end the first half, the visiting team will switch ends and switch benches, so players can play against the other half of the opposing team.
 - a. Note: depending on the tiering system being used by MHA's, teams may not switch ends to similar tiers of players to play against each other in both halves of the game.
- XIV. Teams will share the respective player benches with each team using the gate closest to the net they are defending.
- XV. The main score clock can be used as the time-keeping device for both games simultaneously.
- XVI. No score is kept, and no game sheets are necessary.

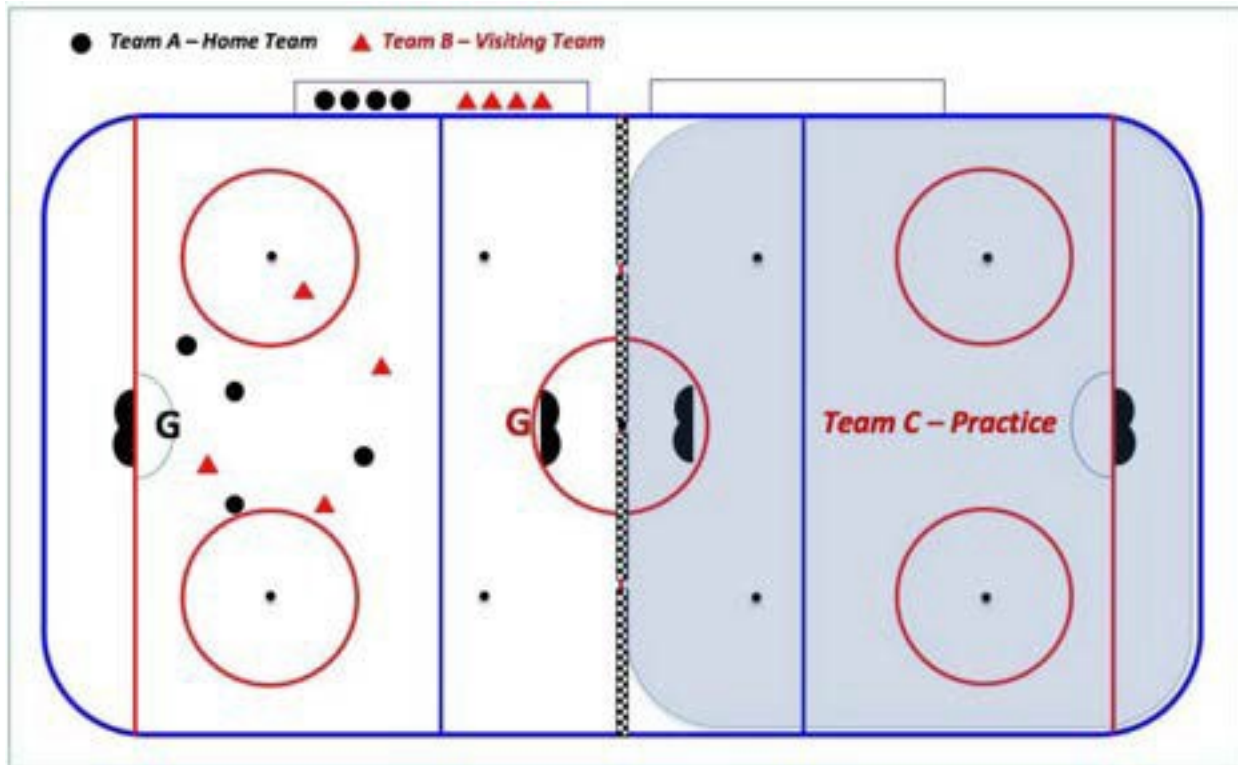


FIGURE 4: Two Team – One Half Ice Game Model – with Practice Sheet

Rules for Half Ice Game Play

1. Playing Rules

- a. Four vs Four format- each team with a goaltender
- b. Each team is required to have two goaltenders, one for each half of the ice.
- c. The warmup is 3 minutes.
- d. The rink set-up:
 - i. One set of barriers or two sets of barriers with a small space in between for spare players
 - ii. Game length 40 minutes
 - iii. Two 20-minute halves
- e. Puck- The blue 4oz puck must be used for all half ice games.
 - i. Scaling down all aspects of practice and game play for players eight and under is beneficial.
 - ii. The blue puck is an appropriate weight in relation to the height and weight of these young players.
 - iii. Use of the Blue puck can promote proper mechanics in shooting, passing, and carrying the puck.
- f. Shift Length- recommended to be 1 minute but can be 2 minutes in duration (at the discretion of the MHA) with an automatic buzzer or whistle sounding to indicate players change. The clock continues to run throughout the 20- minute half.
 - i. Both games are synchronized.
 - ii. Officials work together to keep the games synchronized.
- g. Players change on the fly.
 - i. If there are fewer than four players on the bench, the active player designated to stay out for the following shift (double shifting) must tag up at the bench prior to racing to play the loose puck.
- h. There will be two face-offs during the game:
 - i. The first face off will start the game and,
 - ii. The second face off will start the second half.

2. Shifts

- a. Player shifts are recommended to be 1 minute but maybe 2 minutes at the discretion of the Minor Hockey Association. A buzzer or whistle will sound to signal line changes.
- b. On the buzzer sound, players must relinquish control of the puck immediately and vacate the ice. The new players enter onto the ice surface immediately.
- c. Failure to immediately relinquish control of the puck at the buzzer/whistle or new players entering the ice surface prematurely may result in a penalty for the offending team.

3. Tiering

- a. Grouping players of like ability is important for setting young players up for success and enjoyment. The focus of U9 programming model is player development. It is important in both station-based practices and in half ice game play that players are grouped by similar ability level when possible or necessary

- b. Prior to the start of the half-ice game(s) coaches of opposing teams must discuss the possible line combinations to ensure that the skill level of the players on the ice is similar which will allow more puck touches and fun for all the players participating.

TIERING WITHIN A TEAM



The 18 players on these two teams have been divided into skill-based lines, with like-skill players from each team playing against the other. These teams can be from the same or different associations.

4. Change of Possession

- a. Goaltender freezes the puck-the official blows the whistle to indicate the attacking team backs off and the defending team gets possession.
- b. Puck shot out of play- the offending team backs off and the official gives the non-offending team a new puck.

5. Penalties

- a. Minor penalties are noted by the official with the official briefly raising the arm to indicate penalty will be assessed. At the conclusion of the shift, the official notifies the coach of the infraction and the number of the offending player.
- b. If the offending team controls the puck after the infraction, the official blows the whistle and calls for a change of possession and the non-offending team is given room to play the puck (3-meter cushion).
- c. The offending players are required to sit out the next shift, but the team will play even strength.
- d. Should an infraction occur, that would normally require a player to be ejected from the game (e.g., Game Misconduct, Match penalty or Gross Misconduct), then the player will be removed from the remainder of that game. Even under the circumstances teams will not play short-handed and no game incident report will be required.

6. Goaltending

- a. The recommendations in the U9 game-play model are that all players have an opportunity to play goal. All players should rotate through the goalie position throughout the season. The Hockey Canada Long Term Player Development philosophy encourages a wide range of skill development at an early age and focusing on a single position may limit a child's opportunity to practice skills in all areas.

7. Officiating

- a. At the U9 level a one (1) official system will be employed for half ice games.
 - i. The one official system provides officials with an opportunity to experience several aspects of officiating, while keeping the operating costs at a manageable level for minor hockey associations.
 - ii. Minor hockey associations may choose to use registered minor hockey players instead of officials in the one official system. The registered players must be at least Peewee age and can wear a team issued tracksuit on the ice with black CSA approved helmet with a CSA approved half visor and a neck guard.
 1. Once registering as an official, an official's jersey, with the HNO logo would be required to be worn while working games as an official.
 - iii. Further details on the role of the official are provided in the Hockey Canada U9 Program resource guide.

Season Length & Number of Games

- I. Modified games (Cross or Half ice) are permitted to start November 1st and the season must end by March 31st.
 - a. Teams will not have a cap on the number of games they can play in a season.
- II. No playoffs will be permitted for any U9 leagues.
- III. No exhibition games, jamborees, tournaments, or league games are permitted before November 1st.
- IV. Any team, league or association permitting full ice games will have all remaining travel permits and exhibition permits revoked and will lose U9 jamboree/tournament sanctioning for at least one year.
- V. We do recommend that Minor Hockey Associations/Leagues and teams build a schedule to fall within Hockey Canada's Long-Term Development Model for U9 Hockey as outlined below.

Jamborees and Tournaments

- I. The games played half ice as part of tournaments from November to the end of March will be played as jamborees. They will follow the half ice game play model outlined above.

Categories of Play & Declaring Teams

- I. U9 hockey will only have one category of play called U9 A.
- II. Teams must be declared by November 15th as per HNO Regulation C.

Travel Permits

- I. Travel Permits are required for jamborees outside your home association and for exhibition games.
- II. No travel permits will be permitted before November 1st or after March 31st.
- III. U9 teams are not permitted to travel outside of HNO Boundaries.
 - a) Associations that reside in the Eastern and Western zones may apply for one out of branch jamboree, provided they are located a minimum distance of 250 kilometers from Thunder Bay. These teams must submit the HNO U7/U9 Out of Branch Travel Application Form.

Full Ice Transition Phase

- I. Teams are allowed the option to transition to full ice as of March 1st of each season.
- II. Teams may use black pucks after March 1st. Blue pucks should still be used as a teaching tool.
- III. Teams may only play four (4) or fewer full-ice games. These games must be held on or after March 1st and must be completed by March 31st.
 - a. Teams must still follow the suggested number of half-ice games during the Preparation/Evaluation & Development phase (up to six half-ice games) and the Regular Season phase (up to twenty-two half-ice games) phases as outlined in the Hockey Canada U9 pathway.
- IV. Full-ice tournaments or jamborees are not permitted.
- V. It will be up to each coach's discretion on when they would like to transition to full ice after March 1st.
- VI. The transition phase is optional. Minor Hockey Associations can choose to play the entire season half-ice four on four if they choose.
- VII. This transition phase will be for both 1st and 2nd year U9 Players (i.e., 7- and 8-year-old players) with the understanding that first year players will go back to half-ice at the beginning of the following season.
- VIII. At no time will the score be kept for any game.
- IX. Teams are not permitted to participate in out-of-branch full-ice events (ex.: tournaments, games, jamborees).
- X. Practices should still be station based with a focus on individual skills.
- XI. Shift lengths will still be determined by the buzzer.
- XII. Organizations are welcome to reach out and contact officials if they would like. This should be an opportunity for young officials to learn the rules of the game as well.

Additional Transition Phase Notes:

- The structure of the season should not change because of this recommendation. Practices will remain station based with a heavy focus on skill development.
- Travel Permit requirements will be the same. If teams are playing outside of their own association, they will need to apply for a travel permit.

- This is a transition phase to allow players at U9 to experience full-ice hockey before moving up to U11. The focus should always remain on skill development and there should be no aspect of competitiveness. Players should all receive equal opportunity to play full ice, just as they would in half-ice programming.
- If coaches do not feel as though a full-ice transition will benefit their players development, they by no means need to play full-ice hockey.
- This recommendation is to allow for flexibility in the last month of the season. If coaches/organizations, feel as though this would hurt the overall experience and development of their players they do not need to partake in full-ice hockey.
- If coaches/organizations do not follow this policy and are found to have exceeded any of the limits listed above, they will be subject to discipline at HNO's discretion.

Resources

- [Hockey Canada U9 Program Resource Guide](#)
- [Hockey Canada Administrator's Guide- Initiation Program](#)
- [U9 Hockey Information for Parents](#)
- [Practice Plans](#)
- [Role of the Official](#)
- [FAQ](#)
- [Hockey Canada Network App](#)
- [Hockey Canada Drill Hub](#)
- [Rink Dimensions in NWO](#)

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