

CLASSIFICATIONS OF ICE HOCKEY

SKILL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

In 1991, USA Hockey introduced the Skill Development Program (formerly the Initiation Program) in an effort to ensure that a young skater's first experience with ice hockey would be both positive and safe. The goal of the program is to teach beginners the fundamentals of ice hockey – skating, passing, stickhandling and shooting – while emphasizing skill development, cooperation, fair play, fitness, safety and, most importantly, fun. Many local associations also offer learn-to-play programs for those individuals who are introduced to the game as teens or adults.

RECREATIONAL

The backbone of all USA Hockey programs, recreational leagues offer the opportunity to practice and play games within a local rink, town or association. USA Hockey and its volunteers stress the fun, skill development and fellowship aspects of the game in an effort to build a solid foundation that leads to a lifetime of hockey-playing enjoyment. Recreational programs for girls and women are conducted in the following age categories: 8 & Under, 10 & Under, 12 & Under, 14 & Under, 16 & Under, 19 & Under and Senior Women's A, B and C.

SELECT

For those players who desire a more competitive environment, USA Hockey Affiliates may offer local and regional development camps. These allow the more advanced player a chance to improve her skills, learn sophisticated team concepts and compete for local, state, regional and USA Hockey National Championships. Select Teams may fall into the same age categories as recreational programs.

Advanced levels for women include high school, prep school, Senior A and collegiate (varsity and club) programs.

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GETTING STARTED

The first step in joining an ice hockey team in your area is to call or visit your local rink or hockey association. If you are unable to locate a program in your area, we encourage you to contact one of the representatives listed here for further assistance.

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THIS IS USA HOCKEY

USA Hockey, Inc., is the National Governing Body for the sport of ice hockey in the United States. Its mission is to promote the growth of hockey in America and provide the best possible experience for all participants by encouraging, developing, advancing and administering the sport.

USA Hockey is the official representative to the United States Olympic Committee and the International Ice Hockey Federation. In this role, USA Hockey is responsible for organizing and training men's and women's teams for international tournaments, including the IIHF World Championships and the Olympic Winter Games. Closer to home, USA Hockey works with the National Hockey League and the National Collegiate Athletic Association on matters of mutual interest.

USA Hockey's primary emphasis is on the support and development of grassroots hockey programs. USA Hockey is divided into 12 geographical districts throughout the United States.

Each district has a registrar to register teams; a referee-in-chief to register officials and organize clinics; a coach-in-chief to administer educational programs for coaches; a risk manager to oversee liability and safety programs; and a skill development program administrator to facilitate learn-to-play programs for youth players and their parents.

For players, USA Hockey annually conducts regional and national championship tournaments in various age classifications; sponsors regional and national player identification and development camps; studies and makes recommendations for protective equipment; and provides an insurance program that includes excess accident, general liability and catastrophic coverage.

For coaches and officials, USA Hockey conducts clinics and produces training manuals and videos through the Coaching Education Program and the Officiating Education Program. USA Hockey also promotes uniformity in playing rules and the interpretation of those rules.

USA Hockey has not forgotten parents, supplying this vital segment of the hockey family with a "Parent's Introduction To Youth Hockey" brochure, which includes tips on buying equipment, rules of the game and the role of parents in youth sports.

USA Hockey also publishes *USA Hockey Magazine*, the most widely circulated hockey publication in the world, which is sent to the household of every registered member as a benefit of membership. The organization's official website, usahockey.com, also provides up-to-the-minute coverage of news and events.

In December 1994, USA Hockey introduced its official inline hockey program – USA Hockey InLine – to provide structure and support for the growth of the sport across America.



GIRLS' & WOMEN'S HOCKEY



HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S GAME

THE HISTORY OF WOMEN'S ICE HOCKEY

Most people are surprised to learn that women's ice hockey has a history that dates back more than 100 years, beginning with the earliest known film image of women involved in a game of ice hockey – featuring Isobel Preston, daughter of Lord Stanley Preston (of Stanley Cup lore) playing hockey on a flooded lawn in the winter of 1890.

There is little doubt that women played the sport well before the first newspaper account of a game between two unnamed women's teams appeared in the Ottawa Citizen on Feb. 11, 1891. After much research, that game, which was played in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, is now regarded as the start of women's ice hockey.

Over the span of a century, girls and women have pursued their interest in the sport, and today that segment continues to be one of the fastest growing among USA Hockey membership.

A look back at the history of the women's game reveals an amazing evolution, with the best yet to come for females involved in the sport.

GRASSROOTS ICE HOCKEY

During the 1990-91 season, 5,573 female ice hockey players registered with USA Hockey. Since then, that number has increased nearly 10 times with more than 59,000 registered girls and women playing ice hockey across the United States today. While the number of girls/women's teams has grown significantly, many females continue to play on mixed-gender teams.

USA HOCKEY NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS

The early 1980s ushered in a new era, as USA Hockey hosted the first of its Girls'/Women's National Championships. Today, there are eight female-specific divisions: Girls' 12 & Under, 14 & Under, 16 & Under, 19 & Under, and Women's Senior A, B, C and 30 & Over. The USA Hockey National Championships are designed to provide competitive playing opportunities in the spirit of good sportsmanship for all levels of the organization's membership. Over time the tournaments have brought recognition to such perennial powerhouses as the Connecticut Polar Bears and Assabet Valley (Mass.) programs.

AT THE HIGH SCHOOL LEVEL

In 1993, a survey was conducted by the Minnesota State High School League in an effort to gain an accurate assessment of those sports holding the most interest among females. More than 8,000 females expressed interest in ice hockey, and on March 21, 1994, the Minnesota State High School League sanctioned girls' ice hockey as a varsity sport, making Minnesota the first state to do so.

Since then, numerous high schools across the country have sanctioned girls' ice hockey as a varsity sport, helping to support the expansion of the sport at the college level.

WOMEN'S COLLEGE ICE HOCKEY

Women's collegiate ice hockey continues to grow and gain acceptance. Support from organizations such as USA Hockey, the National Collegiate Athletic Association and the United States Olympic Committee is helping to advance the game to new levels. The face of women's college ice hockey is a constantly changing one, as institutions add programs or upgrade existing club teams to varsity status.

In the 1999-2000 season, the Western Collegiate Hockey Association joined the Eastern College Athletic Conference as the second league in the nation to offer women's Division I competition. Now with the additions of Hockey East and College Hockey America, there are four Division I leagues. Overall, more than 120 women's teams (Division I, Division III and club) currently compete at the collegiate level.

A major step was taken in 1997-98 with the debut of the American Women's College Hockey Alliance, a program that was funded through the USOC/NCAA Conference Grant Program. The purpose of the AWCHA was to organize and develop activities with collegiate women's varsity ice hockey teams to nationally promote the development and sponsorship of women's ice hockey at all NCAA levels throughout the United States. The inaugural AWCHA Division I National Ice Hockey Championship was held in March 1998, with the University of New Hampshire defeating Brown University, 4-1, to become the first recognized national champion in women's college ice hockey.



Following two more ACHA National Championships, USA Hockey's mission was accomplished when it passed the torch to the NCAA. In August 2000, the NCAA announced it would hold its first Division I Women's Ice Hockey National Championship the following season. The University of Minnesota Duluth captured the inaugural NCAA Division I Women's Ice Hockey Championship, defeating St. Lawrence University, 4-2, on March 25, 2001.

The 1997-98 season also marked another first with the creation of the Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award, designed to recognize the accomplishments of the most outstanding player in women's college ice hockey each season. The award is presented by The USA Hockey Foundation to the player who represents the highest standards of personal and team excellence, and in 1998, the inaugural Patty Kazmaier Memorial Award went to forward Brandy Fisher of the University of New Hampshire.

THE INTERNATIONAL SCENE

As far back as 1916, women's ice hockey teams from Canada and the United States have competed against each other. The 1980s, however, propelled women's ice hockey into the future. In April 1987, the Ontario Women's Hockey Association hosted the first World Invitational Tournament, which proved to be a resounding success. During that tournament, representatives from participating nations met to discuss the future of women's ice hockey and to establish a strategy to lobby the International Ice Hockey Federation for the creation of a World Women's Championship.

Those discussions led to the first-ever IIHF World Women's Championship, which was held in March 1990 in Ottawa. Canada won the gold medal at that historic event and repeated as champion at each of the next seven IIHF World Women's Championships with the United States taking the silver medal. In 2005, the U.S. defeated Canada in a shootout to win its first-ever world title. Team USA then repeated the feat with another gold medal in 2008.

April 1995 saw the formation of the first-ever IIHF Pacific Women's Hockey Championship, with teams from the U.S., Canada, China and Japan competing in San Jose, Calif. Vancouver, British Columbia, served as the site for the 1996 IIHF Pacific Women's Hockey Championship, where Canada, the U.S. and China repeated as gold, silver and bronze medalists from the previous year.

When the U.S. defeated Canada, 3-0, in the championship game of the 1997 Three Nations Cup in Lake Placid, N.Y., it marked the first time Canada had been shut out. It was also Team USA's first gold medal in international competition, foreshadowing the future.

Women's ice hockey received its most prestigious acknowledgment in 1992 when the International Olympic Committee voted to include it as a full-medal Olympic sport beginning in 2002. The IOC gave the organizers of the 1994 Winter Games in Lillehammer, Norway, and the 1998 Winter Games in Nagano, Japan, the option of including women's ice hockey on their programs. Norway declined, but Japan accepted and set the wheels in motion for a historic event.



On Feb. 17, 1998, Team USA defeated Team Canada, 3-1, to earn the first Olympic gold medal ever awarded in women's ice hockey, forever securing its place in the record books and earning the admiration of an entire nation. The U.S. followed that up with a silver medal on home ice at the 2002 Olympic Winter Games held in Salt Lake City and a bronze medal at the 2006 Olympic Winter Games in Torino, Italy.

In 2008, the IIHF added a world championship at the Under-18 level and again, the U.S. made history. On January 12, 2008, the U.S. Women's National Under-18 Team captured the first-ever gold medal at the IIHF World Women's U18 Championship in Calgary.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE MEN'S AND WOMEN'S GAME

While the rules for men's and women's ice hockey are virtually the same, the most significant difference between the two is that women's ice hockey does not allow body checking at any level. Body checking is when a player uses the hip or shoulder to slow or stop an opponent who has control of the puck.

Players may use the body to "ride" another player off the puck, but direct and intentional checking will result in a penalty. The no-check rule allows players to concentrate on the basic skills of hockey – skating, passing, stickhandling and shooting.

Women also wear the same basic protective equipment as men, but girls and women are encouraged to wear female shoulder/chest pads and pelvic protectors. Check with your local sporting goods store for these products.