

THE AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT MODEL AT 8U HOCKEY



HOW TO IMPLEMENT CROSS-ICE GAMES AT THE 8U MITE LEVEL

1. AN INTRODUCTION
TO CROSS-ICE HOCKEY

2. EVERYTHING YOU
NEED TO BEGIN

3. HOW TO CONDUCT
A CROSS-ICE GAME

4. ALL ABOUT
CROSS-ICE HOCKEY



PROUD PARTNERS IN HOCKEY

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1. AN INTRODUCTION TO CROSS-ICE HOCKEY

In a cross-ice environment, a player's activity level skyrockets because their engagement level increases, which leads to an increased skill set and love of the game. Drills are designed to focus on multiple skills and situations, increasing time with the puck and situational repetition. The goalies are also more involved in the drills because they get more shots to stop. It's been proven that kids who begin their hockey training in this environment develop a better foundation of skills and hockey instincts, and enjoy the game more.

It's because of this emphasis on fun and development that we're asking associations, teams, coaches and parents to include station-based practices and cross-ice games at the 8U Mite level. Doing so is an important part of the development process at this age.

WE NEED EVERYONE ON THE SAME TEAM

If this is to work for the players, parents, coaches and administrators, communication and education to constituents of USA Hockey are a top priority. Affiliates and their individual associations need to have a communication plan in place to educate the parents. As USA Hockey, your affiliate and your local association work to provide the best possible hockey environment for children, it is important that coaches and associations take the time to inform and educate the parents of our players in regard to the ADM and in the role it plays in the lifelong enjoyment of the game of hockey.

Speaking of enjoyment, it is important for all our coaches, and parents, to create a positive environment for all players. Children that play in a fun learning environment will strive to get better and continue to play the game. But fun doesn't mean undisciplined or unstructured play or practices. Fun is challenging. Engaging. Fun is what unlocks the key to learning. And playing in a competitive environment is an essential part of a child's development. This does not mean that the formation of teams, winning, losing and competing for championships are the most important aspects at 8U Mite.

Rather, this competitiveness must be fostered and enhanced at an individual level. Players should be encouraged to be the very best they can be, to battle for the puck and to compete hard in every cross-ice game, during competition and practice.

Flexibility is a key component of cross-ice hockey at the 8U age level. Each association's is unique to itself in terms of its registered players, age demographics, ice time availability, etc. Associations are free to tailor their cross-ice programs to their individual situation in their quest to provide the best experience possible. Adjusting the game play or small area competitive games to accommodate the number of players on any given day is an important part of implementation. Coaches need to be flexible to keep kids engaged and increase activity. Ideally players should be active every other shift or a minimum of 50% of the allocated play time.

For example: Teams of 7 players in a 3v3 game can be easily accommodated by rotating a group of 3 and a group of 4 so players are active every other shift.

WHAT CROSS-ICE HOCKEY IS ALL ABOUT

Coaching at the 8U level is all about the kids being engaged and active. Keep in mind that it is critical at this age for kids to have fun. Players that have fun will want to return, and by getting them to return we can further their development. It's critical to remember that when coaching this age group: no lines, no laps and no lectures.

The new Coaching Education Program has been designed to train our coaches in regard to age-appropriate coaching. This has been launched in conjunction with the American Development Model and will better prepare our coaches for the specifics of coaching and training players at each individual age level.

2. EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO BEGIN

All cross-ice programs are to be registered as Red, White and Blue Hockey and treated the same as the previous I/P rosters. When players are assigned to a Red, White and Blue Hockey roster, it let's associations know that they are properly registered with USA Hockey. Here are a few other things to note when it comes to rosters:

1. All coaches involved with a Red, White and Blue cross-ice program must be on a Red, White and Blue roster.
2. The roster, complete with all on-ice coaches, needs to be submitted to the district registrar according to the affiliate and district rules.
3. Player signatures are not required.
4. Moving players from team to team within an association will not require changes to a Red, White and Blue roster. This flexibility will allow associations to manage their rosters and teams and eliminate extra paperwork within associations.

5. The Red, White and Blue rosters are all that is needed for associations and teams to participate in games, jamborees and tournament formats.

From this pool of registered players, associations are encouraged to form teams. Even though we're not keeping track of wins or losses, forming a team is done to highlight the camaraderie and relationships that are built through team sports. With the flexibility of Red, White and Blue roster requirements, associations can change teams throughout the year if the situation is warranted. For example, if there are changes in numbers, ability, or tournament and jamboree opportunities, associations can mix it up. Note that affiliate and district rules for players at the 6U and 8U age levels must be followed.

COACHES AND OFFICIALS

Associations should have set coaches in place for each team to coordinate activities that are team based such as games, tournaments, jamborees, off-ice activities and get-togethers. When involved in station-based practices, coaches will stay at their station while the players rotate. This gives all the coaches and players in an association the opportunity for interaction.

For officials, it is up to each association, league, tournament and jamboree organizer to decide the level of importance that officiating plays in their situation. While some associations may choose to use coaches in the process of officiating games at the youngest levels, others may choose to employ uniformed referees during games.

6U – USA Hockey suggests that except for special events and jamborees, coaches are used to facilitate games at a 6U level.

8U – USA Hockey suggests that except for scrimmages, referees are used for all games.

Important note: Please refer to the USA Hockey Cross-Ice Officiating Guide for more information on this topic.

CROSS-ICE HOCKEY OFF THE ICE

One of the tenets of the ADM and cross-ice hockey at the 8U age level is to limit the amount of travel and to eliminate missing school for hockey. Based on retention research, too much travel at too young of an age is one of the leading causes of burnout for players and parents.

USA Hockey strongly encourages that districts and affiliates enforce regulations that would prohibit the scheduling of any 8U competition that forces a player at the 8U level to miss any portion of any school day for games, tournaments or jamborees.

And, in case there was any concern, the locker room environment will be the same as it always is when kids are playing cross-ice hockey. It should not in any way inhibit associations, teams and coaches from the camaraderie and bonding that is an essential part of the hockey locker room environment. USA Hockey locker room supervision guidelines as spelled out in the Annual Guide must be followed.

3. HOW TO CONDUCT A CROSS-ICE GAME

While the definition of what constitutes a “mite game” is left up to each affiliate based on their rules, the main goal is to maximize the amount of actual playing time that the players are to be involved in. For example, instead of having a 2-minute warm-up followed by 3 periods of 8 minutes with a 2-minute rest between each period, allow the kids to play for 30 minutes straight. This way, they gain an additional 6 minutes of play. Instead of looking for traditional definitions, affiliates and associations should look to define what constitutes a “game day” as opposed to individual “games” at the 8U level.

Affiliates and districts are encouraged to implement rules that would define a game day for a player at 8U as a minimum of 50 minutes of game play slot and the maximum of 120 minutes of game play per day, regardless of the number of periods or the number of opponents during that time frame.

8U TOURNAMENT OR JAMBOREE

USA Hockey suggests that affiliates look to define and/or limit a tournament or jamboree at the 8U level based on the number of game hours played.

CLARIFICATION OF DAILY GAME LIMITS

USA Hockey suggests that the duration of an individual competition (game) is left up to the association and should be based on a number of factors, including length of ice session, number of teams involved and more. Affiliates should look at setting a time limit to the number of hours that 8U players can play in a single day as opposed to a game count limit based on the variables of game duration listed above.

CLARIFICATION OF SEASONAL GAME DAY LIMITS

USA Hockey suggests that only cross-ice game do not count as cross-ice programs. Cross-ice games are part of the big-picture learning experience of Red, White and Blue Hockey.

CREATING THE GAME DAY EXPERIENCE

When necessary, and as players move up from the 6U level to the 8U level, consideration should be given to creating a greater game experience. This will provide a progression of play for our players and parents alike. Additions to the game experience could include scorecard flip charts at each game area, referees and the use of benches in the neutral zone for each team.

USA Hockey suggests that governing affiliates determine their own level of need in creating a progression of play for players and parents in their jurisdiction.

For goalies, full-time goaltenders or even part-time goaltenders are not necessary at the 8U level. However, if a child’s sole reason to play hockey is to be a goaltender, than that child should be allowed to take up the position of goaltender. During practice, it is of extreme importance that the goaltender be involved in all the stations (regardless of whether or not a station has a net). The overall athleticism and fundamental hockey skills of these goaltenders must still be emphasized at the same level of the other players.

USA Hockey suggests that there are no goaltenders during game play at the 6U level.

USA Hockey suggests the use of rotating goaltenders, size-appropriate nets or specialty target nets at 8U.





GENERAL RED, WHITE, AND BLUE PROCESSES

Red, White and Blue Hockey is USA Hockey's version of the cross-ice game. And the benefits are endless. Because without the comfort of open ice, kids have to rely on creative ways to stickhandle, skate and outsmart their opponent. It's been proven that kids who begin their hockey training in this environment develop a better foundation of skills and hockey instincts and enjoy the game more.

- ▶ Each game lasts 50–60 minutes.
- ▶ The goal is to keep the players active every other shift in order to maximize playing time.
- ▶ Begin with a quick 3-minute warm-up.
- ▶ For 8U kids, keep shifts to 60 seconds. 90 seconds for 6U.
- ▶ Use a running clock buzzer to keep track of time.
- ▶ As best as you can, match players with similar ability levels.
- ▶ Face-offs after goals and/or tie-ups are recommended, but drop the puck quickly instead of waiting for all players to line up in the right position.
- ▶ Rotate teams every 20 minutes or so.
- ▶ At 6U play 3v3 with mini nets (2' x 3') and no goalies. At 8U play 4v4 with intermediate nets (3' x 4.5') and goalies.
- ▶ Make sure you keep plenty of water bottles by the dividers.

GAME RULES

Choose either of the below options, a combination of these options or any option that follows the Red, White and Blue Hockey guidelines tailored to fit your unique cross-ice programs and game day competition. Playing half-ice games at the 8U level is also an option.

▶ **Option 1:** Don't keep track of score or use referees.

When one team scores they must hustle back and touch their own post. The team that gets scored on must dig the puck out

of the net and take the puck behind the net before they can attack offensively. No puck dropping, just lots of puck touches and play time.

▶ **Option 2:** Score is kept, but not recorded or posted.

Referees are utilized to facilitate the game. After a goal is scored, a quick face-off is used to restart the game. Even with the addition of referees and keeping score, the emphasis is still on maximizing puck touches and playing time.

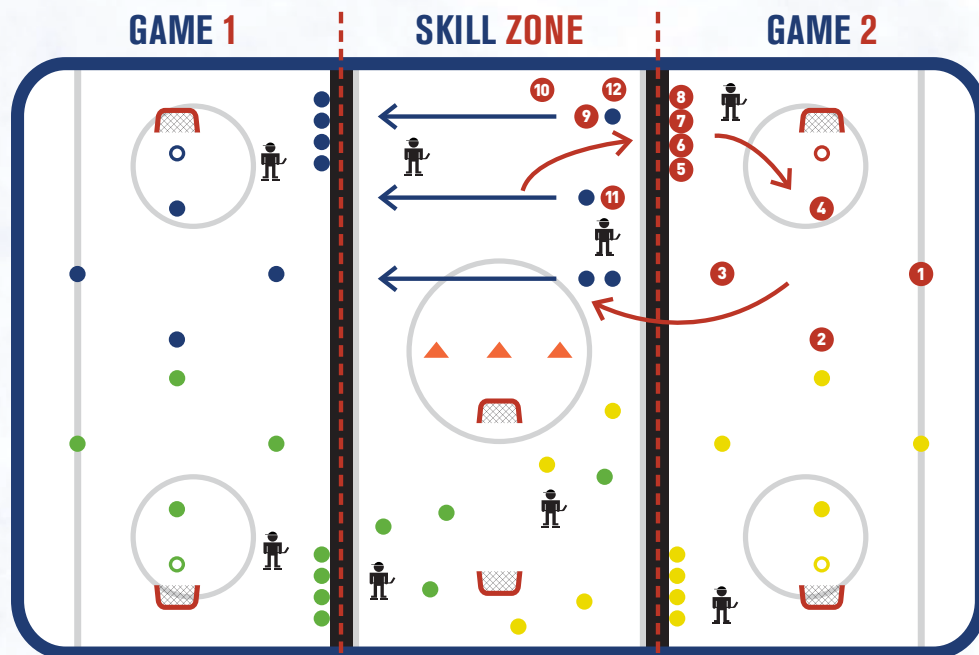
KEY POINTS

- ▶ **1.** Keeping score in cross-ice games should be used only as a tool to enhance the progression of players and create a game environment at 8U. Wins, losses, individual statistics and standings should not be a part of 8U hockey.
- ▶ **2.** Referees are encouraged to start at 8U. They do not call penalties, but rather help instruct players to follow the rules. For any flagrant infractions, situations that could result in injury, or repeated penalty situations for one player, the referee will escort that player to the coach for further instruction and/or discipline if needed.
- ▶ **3.** Shift lengths are designed to allow each age group to involve themselves in play based on their age, size and skill level, as well as to begin to introduce a sense of urgency into each shift.

8U SPECIFIC 4V4 2 GAMES WITH SKILL ZONE

- ▶ Using the principles listed above, start with **4** teams and **12** players per team.
- ▶ Each team creates **3** groups of **4** players. Players rotate from gameplay to Skill Zone to bumper/bench. Rotate every **60** seconds.
- ▶ A minimum of **2** coaches per team (for a total of **8**) is ideal to oversee Skill Zone and player rotation. Goalies play in with intermediate - or regulation - size nets. If there are no goalies, play with small (2'x3') nets.
- ▶ In the Skill Zone, have extra nets, cones and blue pucks for kids to experiment in an unstructured environment or run drills to work on skill techniques — the same that you would do in a cross-ice or station-based practice.
- ▶ If you have more teams, simply play another game instead of having a Skill Zone. Just start with **6** teams and **8** players per team and proceed with **4** on **4** gameplay in all **3** zones.

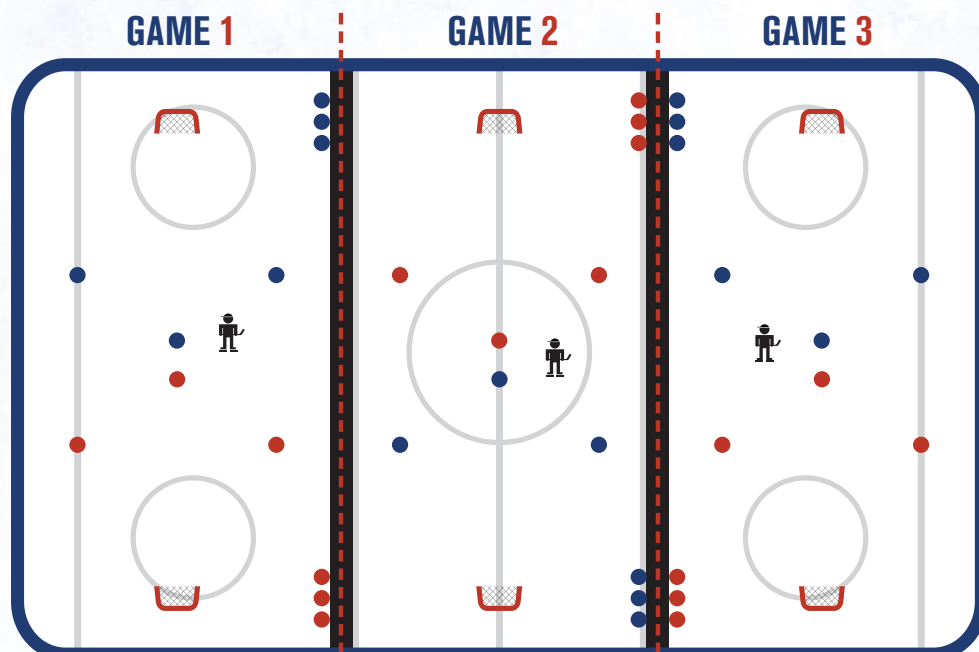
Note: Position bumpers over blue line to make **3** equal-size zones.



6U 3V3 3 CROSS-ICE GAMES

- ▶ Using the same principles listed previously (on the other side), start with **6** teams and **6** players per team.
- ▶ No goalies and play with small nets.
- ▶ Don't keep score, just let the kids play and have fun.
- ▶ If you are running **2** games with a Skill Zone in the middle, refer to the 8U model but stick to playing **3** on **3**.

Note: Position bumpers over blue line to make **3** equal-size zones.



4. ALL ABOUT CROSS-ICE HOCKEY

1. What are the advantages of practicing in small areas and playing cross-ice games?

Our Red, White, and Blue program is based on a model of practicing and playing hockey across the ice surface, as compared to practicing and playing along the full length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing and playing model actually has been around for as long as the game has been played. When players played on a pond, they didn't use an ice surface of 200' x 85'. Playing in the smaller area develops and sharpens their skills without the rules of off-sides, icing, penalties, face-offs or even positional play. Hockey sense and hockey instincts were developed.

This model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations and by the world's best players for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been shown that children who begin their hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience and develop a better base of skills as they progress through our sport.

2. How do we transition our current system of full-ice play at 8U to playing cross-ice at 8U?

USA Hockey has identified cross-ice as the standard of 8U hockey games. Each affiliate is responsible to find a way to expedite the transition into cross-ice hockey for all mites in their area and implement this standard. Affiliates will need to take a proactive leadership role in completing this process. For specific questions, please contact your ADM Regional Manager.

3. Why are small group station-based practices important?

Small group station-based practices are important because:

- Moving a player from station to station allows for better time utilization.
- Less ice time is wasted setting up drills.
- With more kids on the ice, associations have the ability to lower cost or increase ice touches with an increase in development.
- Better leverage of coaching — your better coaches now get to affect an entire program of players instead of just one team.
- Kids are 3 times more active than in traditional practices (see chart below).

UNIVERSITY OF PRAGUE STUDY



EXPERIMENTAL GROUP (STATION-BASED PRACTICES)		Number of Practices Observed		CONTROL GROUP (TRADITIONAL PRACTICES)	
Min.	Max.	20	50	Min.	Max.
		Individual Skills			
45 ▶ 145		Shooting		15 ▶ 45	
		80 ◀ Average Number of Repetitions ▶ 25			
45 ▶ 170		Passing		20 ▶ 50	
		90 ◀ Average Number of Repetitions ▶ 30			
45 ▶ 155		Stick-Handling		10 ▶ 25	
		70 ◀ Average Number of Repetitions ▶ 20			

ALL ABOUT CROSS-ICE HOCKEY

4. How do small group station-based skill practices make my child a better player?

It's simple. The player will get more opportunities for individual coaching during a practice. And in that practice, game-like situations are repeatedly featured and experienced, directly translating to success in games. A large part of this success is due to the size of the ice. With a smaller sheet of ice, they'll get more repetitions. And more repetitions means more development.

5. Why does the ADM call for Mites to use a smaller surface for games?

Like other sports, we have modified the playing environment to fit the physical size of our kids. By doing this, kids get to play a version of the real hockey game that is actually more comparable in key areas than a full-ice game is for kids of this size. Incidental physical contact is increased in small area play. This serves as a safe introduction to our progressive body contact and checking skills program that continues through Squirt, Pee Wee and Bantam. Repetition of the most important skating and puck control skills is increased and the environment is better suited to the cognitive development of the players.

Benefits of cross-ice hockey:

- Increases the use of the core skating skills like agility, balance, coordination and quickness.
- Introduces incidental body contact as the introductory phase of USA Hockey's Progressive Body Checking program, providing the atmosphere for increased body contact in a safer environment than full-ice hockey. This forces kids to play with their head up and better prepares them for proper use of body contact/checking at older age groups.
- Number of puck battles is significantly increased.
- Being able to make plays and protect the puck in traffic is a huge difference maker on kids succeeding at higher levels.
- Fundamental skills are reinforced at a greater rate through game play.
- The geometry of the game is enhanced. When playing on the smaller surface, kids are put in similar situations as when professional players are playing on the big sheet. This promotes more effective passing, receiving and support.
- There is less time and space, which increases the frequency of making hockey decisions, provides a better environment for teaching ice awareness and boosts hockey sense.
- Higher intensity level of competition.

- Scoring...scoring...scoring — the playing area is almost entirely the equivalent of the scoring zone, therefore encouraging and increasing the opportunity for players to shoot and score.
- Goaltenders, when introduced, experience more game-like action.
- Teaches players at a young age to control the middle of the rink both offensively and defensively.
- Creates a stronger challenge for our more skilled players by having them face more opposition in a smaller space and therefore requiring a greater degree of skill improvement.
- Builds the confidence of our lesser-skilled players.
- FUN in a competitive learning environment. Even NHL teams use smaller-area games to increase competitiveness, teach the game at a high tempo and keep the game fun!

6. What are the dimensions of a cross-ice game?

With an NHL sheet of ice being 200' x 85', we shrink the playing surface down from blue line to boards, with a skills area in the middle. The cross-ice playing surface boasts the same stride distance (14 strides) for a kid as an NHL rink does for an adult.

7. Why is using the blue puck an important part of 8U hockey?

The blue puck is an appropriate weight in relation to the height and weight of the players. It promotes the ability for children to practice good technique while building confidence and promoting proper mechanics.

8. Why is USA Hockey eliminating Mite travel?

While USA Hockey is not eliminating travel between associations for Mites, it is looking to eliminate Mite travel hockey as it has come to be. The reason is there is too much emphasis put on the formation of travel teams, winning, losing and time spent in the car at the 8U level, and as a result there is not enough emphasis on building the foundation for developing skilled hockey players in the future.

9. I have heard that USA Hockey is eliminating tournaments at 8U. Is this true?

USA Hockey is not advocating the elimination of tournaments, jamborees or inter-association game play. However, USA Hockey is advocating the reduction of the playing surface size to cross-ice at the 8U age group for all competition.

ALL ABOUT CROSS-ICE HOCKEY

10. Will players compete against other players of a similar ability?

One of the most important ADM principles is the grouping of players of like ability. At 8U this is a key element of a player's development. It is important in both practice and in cross-ice game competition for players to be grouped by similar ability whenever possible.

11. Why not teach off-sides at Mites?

Age-appropriate training is one of the most important cornerstones of the ADM. 8U players should concentrate the large majority of their time on skating and puck-handling skills. Concepts such as off-sides, positions and face-off positioning should be introduced at the 10U level. These concepts are easier to learn as the cognitive ability of players increases with age.

12. Will the ADM take away coaches' flexibility to tailor their curriculum to their players?

No. While the ADM has produced a season's worth of practice plans for coaches to use at the 8U level, both associations and coaches should feel free to adjust these practices or add their own based on the needs of their team or association. It is, however, very important for coaches and associations to stay within the skill-based-station-type format recommended by the ADM.

13. What is being done to prepare coaches to better understand and deliver this training plan?

After extensive review and study, the USA Hockey Coaching Education Program (CEP) launched a new direction in hockey coaching education in 2011 to coincide with the ADM. The CEP now requires coaches to take and pass online age-specific modules directly related to the age level in which they are involved, as well as continue to advance through 4 levels of overall coaching education to provide your child with a more educated and experienced coach.

14. Will there still be a progression in Mites, or will my child do the same thing for 4 years if he/she starts hockey at age four?

Each affiliate and individual associations within that affiliate will continue to be in charge of the progression for their players in their affiliate/association. USA Hockey has provided suggestions for this progression at the end of the appropriate areas in this handbook.

15. My teams are consistent winners. Why should I implement the ADM?

There is nothing wrong with success at young ages — it is how you get there that matters more. Making sacrifices in development in order to gain wins will end up being detrimental to a young player down the line. The best coaches at the 8U age group understand that their top priority is to prepare players for 10U.

16. Is the ADM trying to change the way I coach?

Yes, the ADM wants to make coaches aware of what is most important at each stage of a child's athletic development. We only have so much time with the kids, so we need to be efficient and give them what they need most at each stage. Understanding these "Windows of Trainability" will optimize player development and limit coaches' frustrations.

17. Once the ADM is implemented at the Mite level, does USA Hockey have plans to mandate cross-ice hockey games at the Squirt age level also?

No. Cross-ice games and competition are an integral part of the ADM at 8U. Nowhere in the ADM do we require 10U squirts to play cross-ice games. Although many associations have recognized the benefits of half-ice games at 10U and play a portion of their games in this format.

18. Is the ADM just for the recreational player?

Absolutely not. The principles and practices of the ADM ensure that our players continue to develop to the highest possible level and reach their full potential.