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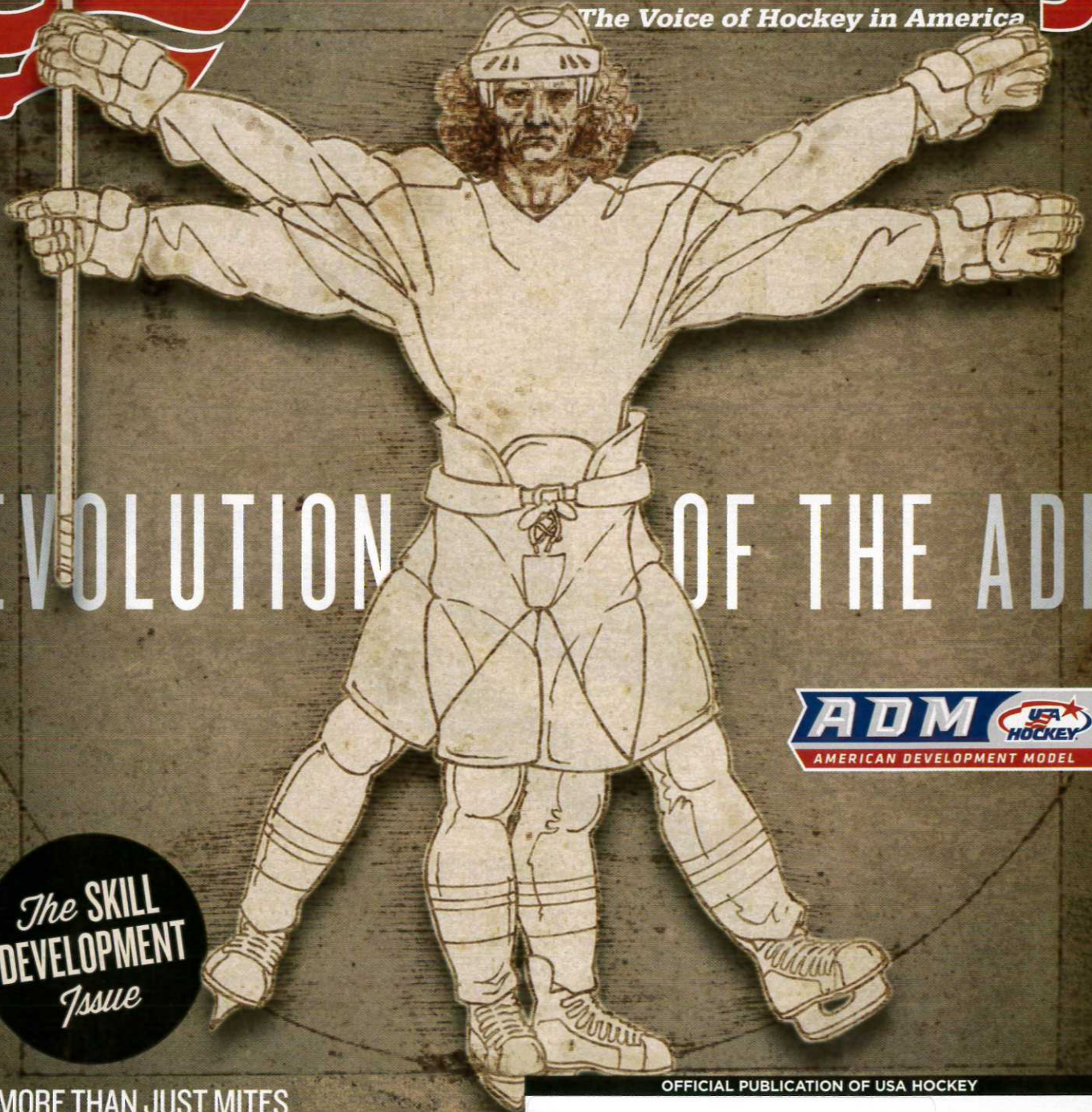
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## EVOLUTION OF THE ADM



*The SKILL  
DEVELOPMENT  
Issue*

- MORE THAN JUST MITES
- LIVING IN THE GOLDEN AGE
- REWIRING ROBOTIC HOCKEY PLAYERS
- WE'RE TALKING ABOUT PRACTICE
- THINGS THAT GO BUMP ON THE ICE

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF USA HOCKEY





# THE EVOLUTION OF THE ADM

REVOLUTIONARY PROGRAM  
EXPANDS ITS FOCUS AND  
SETS ITS SIGHTS ONWARD  
AND UPWARD

**I**t's been five years since USA Hockey unveiled the American Development Model as a way of changing the culture of hockey, a culture that placed too much emphasis on competition at too young an age with not enough time and energy spent on age-appropriate training.

With the backing of the National Hockey League, USA Hockey set out to change the way Americans view the game. Rooted in sports science and based on the principles of long-term athlete development, the ADM is a bottom-to-top approach that places the athlete first so that each player can reach his or her potential.

With a solid foundation in place at the 8 & Under level, the time has come to expand the focus to show how age-appropriate training can benefit all players from Mites to Midgets.

# MORE THAN JUST MIT



## The ADM Looks To Expand Its Focus Heading Into The Future

BY HARRY THOMPSON

**T**he wider the base, the taller the pyramid. It's a concept as old as the Egyptians and as solid as the Sphinx.

Herb Brooks talked about it whenever he brought up the development of future generations of American hockey players. Still, there was no way the architect of the "Miracle on Ice" could have imagined how far the sport has advanced since the advent of the American Development Model.

When it was unveiled in 2009, the plan was to slowly introduce it at the grass-roots level and build it from the ground up. That meant focusing on the development of hockey at the 8 & Under level.

The cornerstone of the effort was the implementation of cross-ice hockey, which creates a more age-appropriate playing surface for younger players. The smaller ice sheet affords players more opportunities to touch the puck and enjoy the thrill of scoring goals. Along with improved fun came better skill development, which provides a solid foundation for the future.

But, a funny thing happened over the course of the first five years of the program's existence. The ADM became synonymous with Mite cross-ice hockey, and the push to expand the program onward and upward never gained much traction.

"Because we launched the American Development Model at the 8 & Under level,

# ES

people assume that it's all cross-ice hockey. And it's not," says ADM Regional Manager Bob Mancini.

"The ADM is a comprehensive plan of development that starts from the ages of 8 & Under and goes all the way through 18 & Under.

"The message that I want to give to parents is to take a look at the ADM and understand that it really is about delivering to your child what's important at each age group."

Now that a strong foundation has been laid, it's time to raise the roof. That's why, heading into the 2014-15 season, there will be a shift in the approach Mancini and other ADM regional managers will take as they hit rinks around the country touting the benefits of long-term athlete development and age-appropriate training.

"As we've committed to this development model at the younger ages, it's time to put a little bit more of the focus on making sure there's quality training and quality practices for our older kids," says Roger Grillo, an ADM regional manager who covers the New England states.

"If you're going to go upstairs, you have to have a furnished bedroom. You can't set the stage at the bottom and have nothing to go to."

To be clear, the core principles of the ADM are not changing. The program's managers and local volunteer coordinators remain committed to the sports science. All they're doing is broadening the focus to

## LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT STAGES

8. **HOCKEY FOR LIFE**
7. **TRAINING TO WIN**  
19+ Junior (NCAA, NHL)
6. **TRAINING TO COMPETE**  
Junior, NCAA
5. **LEARNING TO COMPETE**  
18-and-under (Midgets/High School)
4. **TRAINING TO TRAIN**  
16-and-under (Midgets), 14-and-under (Bantams)
3. **LEARNING TO TRAIN**  
12-and-under (Peewees), 10-and-under (Squirts)
2. **FUNDAMENTALS**  
8-and-under (Mites), 6-and-under (Mites)
1. **ACTIVE START**  
6-and-under



take aim at the Squirt and Peewee levels in an effort to capitalize on the "golden age of skill acquisition."

"Part of our goal this year is to get out and say, 'Squirts and Peewees, this is not just a Mite thing; it's an evolution all the way up to Bantams and Midgets,'" says ADM Regional Manager Matt Herr, who covers the New York and Atlantic Districts. "It's age-appropriate training at all levels, and if you do this then your kid can reach their potential."

There are still small pockets of resistance that exist around the country, but critics and skeptics pale in comparison to the number of parents who have bought into the ADM and demand to see it adopted as their sons and daughters progress up the ladder of development.

"It's gaining momentum quicker than we

ever thought it would, and for people who have experienced well-run ADM programs, there's no way they'll accept anything less," says Kevin McLaughlin, USA Hockey's senior director of development who oversees the program.

The wave of momentum that started with Mites will only grow as more people buy into the ADM and understand that it is a program designed to help the individual, whether he or she is 8 or 18. The science behind the program is irrefutable as is the commitment of USA Hockey and the NHL to see it continue to grow.

The first five years were devoted to changing a culture and creating a mindset that puts the athlete's development ahead of simply playing games. With the base of the pyramid firmly in place, it is now time to see how high it can grow.

"We still have some challenges ahead of us, but I think the ADM as a whole has been very well received and people have bought into it," Grillo says.

"It's just a matter of fine tuning it and tweaking it, and putting out some brushfires that are out there around the country. I think we're in a great spot, but we'll be in a better spot down the road." ★

**"PART OF OUR GOAL THIS YEAR IS TO GET OUT AND SAY, 'SQUIRTS AND PEEWEES, THIS IS NOT JUST A MITE THING, BUT IT'S AN EVOLUTION ALL THE WAY UP TO BANTAMS AND MIDGETS.'"**



# THE POWER OF PRACTICE

The Benefits Of A Well-Crafted Practice Far Outweigh What Can Be Gained In A Game | BY HARRY THOMPSON

**I**n the words of Allen Iverson, when it comes to skill development we are definitely talkin' about practice. Not a game. Not a game. We're talkin' about practice.

While Iverson's anti-practice rant may be taken a little out of context for the sake of this argument, the message still drives home an important point.

When it comes to skill development, especially at the younger age levels, the best way to improve is not by playing more games than an NHLer, but through station-based practices. The number of puck touches and constant activity that take place in a well-run 50-minute practice far

outweigh what transpires in a game.

"One properly-run practice is the equivalent of 11 games when it comes to puck touches," says ADM Regional Manager Ty Hennes.

Think this is just one person's opinion? Just look back at the puck possession study that USA Hockey conducted in 2002 during the Olympic Winter Games in Salt Lake City and the USA Hockey Tier I Youth National Championships to see how much time even the best players had the puck on their stick.

At the Olympic level, observers followed superstars like Tony Amonte, Joe Sakic and Mike Modano, who averaged

1 minute and 7 seconds with the puck. At the youth level, the best players, including Phil Kessel and Zach Parise, possessed the puck an average of 1:06 per game.

On the other hand, a well-run station-based practice keeps kids moving and working on their skills. There are more puck touches and more for players to work on their skills. In short, there's more of everything, including more fun.

Add to the mix small-area games, which work on vital skills in confined spaces that require players to think and act quicker, and you have the makings of a winning formula.

"One of the fastest ways to make a kid lose the passion for anything is not getting them involved," says two-time Olympian Guy Gosselin, who works as an ADM regional manager in the upper Midwest.

"Touching the puck for a minute-plus in a game is not really being involved. You can get 30 minutes of puck-touch time in a station-based practice. That not only helps build their skills, but it's a lot of fun."

A glance at the My Hockey Rankings website shows that some Pee wee teams play almost as many games as an NHL team, and definitely more games than any U.S. college program. Not only does that not help with individual skill development, but playing too many games at too young an age can also lead to burn out.

"It's not what league they play in or what

# CREATIVE LICENSE

## ENCOURAGING CREATIVITY ON THE ICE CAN PULL THE PLUG ON ROBOTIC HOCKEY PLAYERS

**»** SOME CALL THEM hockey school players: great doing drills in practice, but wilt in the heat of a game.

Others say they have all the tools but no toolbox.

But who can blame them? Too often they have fallen victim to a coach's wrath for trying something that resulted in a turnover or scoring opportunity for the opposition. They have had the creativity stomped out of them and have chosen a safer way to play. They have been transformed into robotic hockey players.

There is a fine line between forcing players to operate within a team structure and allowing them the freedom to be creative with the puck. Because of the fluid nature of the game, it is imperative that coaches loosen the reins and let kids play, especially at the younger ages.

"Manufactured hockey players

are a dime a dozen. Creative hockey players are hard to come by," says Guy Gosselin, a two-time U.S. Olympian.

"If you let those kids be creative at a young age, they're going to be creative when they get older."

Coaches may have certain breakout plays or specific power play configurations, but more often than not, things don't go according to plan. As a result, players have to adjust accordingly to their surroundings and ultimately, improvise to make a play.

"We can't run little robots out there," says Ken Martel, technical director with the American Development Model. "Players have



**"PATRICK KANE COULD PROBABLY STICKHANDLE AROUND YOU IN A PHONE BOOTH."**

**-CHRIS DRURY**

to be able to think and make decisions. Sometimes, the greatest plays come from just playing."

Part of that comes with trial-and-error, giving players the freedom to fail so they can learn from their decisions.

Additional factors like a coach's energy and body language can either promote a fun learning environment or discourage players from trying something new.

"We have to allow kids to be themselves, to express themselves and learn at their own pace," says Roger Grillo, who coached

the likes of Martin St. Louis during his career as a college coach. "Not everyone is the same. You need to create an environment that almost encourages failure."

Players should be encouraged to emulate the likes of Patrick Kane or T.J. Oshie, superstars whose hockey IQ and on-ice awareness exceeds that of most players.

"Patrick Kane could probably stickhandle around you in a phone booth," said long-time NHLer and U.S. Olympian Chris Drury.

It is important for youngsters to keep in perspective where they are with their own development, and to not get discouraged if they cannot replicate a move they saw in an NHL game or on YouTube. All that matters is that they keep trying.

"You see videos on YouTube of guys like Sonny Milano bouncing the puck with his stick, that's an art," says Matt Herr, a two-sport star at the University of Michigan who went on to play in the NHL. "It's helping our cause because skill has become cool because of the Kanes and Sonny Milanos coming up with their own moves. That encourages kids to try their own moves."

Grillo suggested that encouraging a 'pond hockey mentality' — where players have free reign on a big open sheet of ice — will develop more creative hockey players.

"We've had that opportunity before to be who we wanted to be and to emulate our heroes and not feel threatened or be told that's the wrong way to approach things," Grillo says.

"We need to bring that pond hockey mentality back into our structured lives."

*-Mark Burns*

team they're on or how many tournaments they play. Their training model is really the dictator of development," says Roger Grillo, a former Div. I college coach who crisscrosses New England in support of the ADM.

USA Hockey recommends that teams

follow a 3:1 practice-to-game ratio. If teams play 70 games, as several Pee wee teams did last season, that means they would need to hit the practice ice more than 200 times. That would put a youth player on the ice every day from the

beginning of August until the end of March. And twice on Sundays.

It's not just practicing but the right type of practice that will yield the best results.

One of the driving factors that has shaped the current competition-heavy model is that parents don't want to sit around and watch their sons and daughters doing a bunch of drills. They want to see them play games, where there is a winner and a loser, a scoreboard and a clock.

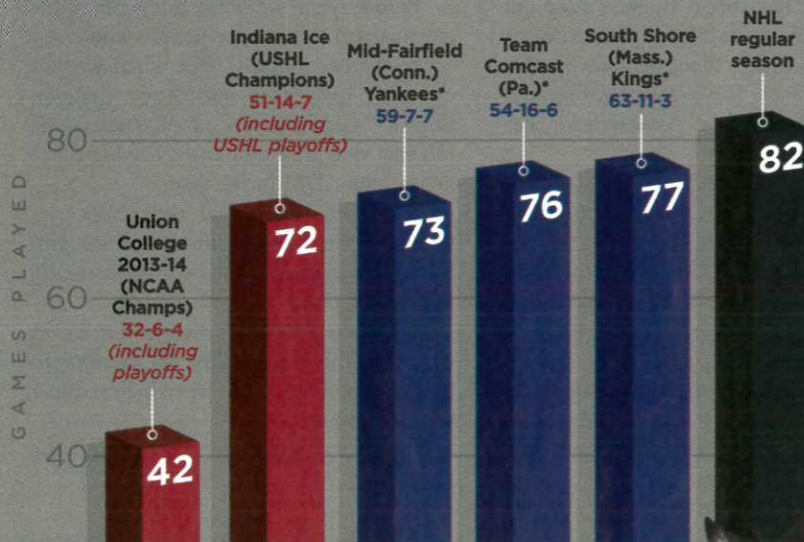
"Unfortunately, most people look at practice like it's something that you have to do rather than embracing it as a quality experience," Grillo says.

"The challenge is one where we have to make sure that we're creating practices that are not only providing players with the quality repetitions, but they're having fun doing it. Practice for little kids shouldn't be like eating broccoli but more like eating pizza."

So yes, we are talkin' about pizza. And practice. ★

## A WEE TOO MANY?

SOME PEEWEES PLAY ALMOST AS MUCH AS THE PROS



BY PHILIP COLVIN

# CHAIRMEN OF THE



# BOARDS

## Portable Hard Dividers Help Take Cross-Ice Hockey To Another Level

**P**erception is reality, especially when mom and dad are watching their sons or daughters playing cross-ice hockey.

While the skill development benefits of youngsters playing on age-appropriate sized surfaces – more fun, increased puck touches, making plays in tight spaces and the quicker decision making that comes with it – have been well documented, some parents still get turned off by the use of fire hoses, pylons or foam rubber dividers to separate the rink into thirds.

That's where portable boards are taking cross-ice hockey to the next level by giving the smaller ice surface the same look

and feel as full-ice games.

"The kids love them because they are playing inside a real rink with real corners, and I think it makes them feel more a part of the game," said Dave Bereson, Flagstaff (Ariz.) Youth Hockey Association vice-president.

The first time the FYHA set up the boards, players started using them to make passes and were aggressive in the corners because they didn't have to worry about falling over the foam bumpers that the association had previously used to divide the ice.

"The boards immediately changed the pace and how the kids played the game," Bereson said. "The kids had a blast. And

the parents saw it, too."

Across the country in western Massachusetts, Don Derosia spends much of his time traveling around the Bay State espousing the virtues of cross-ice hockey.

"Before when we were using the bumper boards for cross-ice people would say 'this isn't real hockey.' But when we put up these boards, it completely changed things," said Derosia, a Massachusetts Hockey vice president and a driving force behind the ADM in the state.

"It looked like a real rink. Now the parents have bought into cross-ice and the ADM, and it was the boards that really turned it around."

The portable boards divide the ice in half or in thirds and allow associations to get more players on the ice, which reduces the cost to play.

On most Saturday mornings, the



# THINGS THAT GO BUMP ON THE ICE

TEACHING CHECKING SKILLS CAN PAY OFF LONG BEFORE PLAYERS REACH THE BANTAM LEVEL

▶ PLAYING IN THE SWEDISH ELITE LEAGUE, Guy Gosselin saw firsthand how hockey is played and taught in Sweden, a country of 64,000 registered players that consistently ranks among the top hockey countries in the world.

Among the many differences he noticed was how the Swedes approached the skill of checking.

"They have a soccer mentality in taking the man off the puck, and we have a football mentality to hit and punish," says Gosselin, a two-time U.S. Olympian.

"We need to lose that football mentality because that's not how the game is played."

So when USA Hockey's board of directors passed the Progressive Checking Skill Development Program in 2011, Gosselin was among the many who hailed the move as a step in the right direction.

"The checking had gotten out of control," said long-time NHLer Doug Zmolek.

"The goal for many wasn't for 'Billy' to advance the puck and/or score, it was to deliver the killer hit. ... How's that for player development?"

The decision to delay the start of legal body checking to Bantams was designed to enhance skill development consistent with the American Development Model and its long-term athlete development principles. An important byproduct is to reduce the risk of injury and make the game safer.

A critical part of this change was that coaches needed to teach the principles of body checking, which starts with angling, body contact and positioning at an early age.

These are skills that naturally developed during the bumping and battling of cross-ice

hockey at the Mite level and can be further developed at Squirts and Peewees, so that by the time a player reaches the age where body checking is legal he is both mentally and physically prepared to do so.

Still, some coaches are more concerned with winning than with development, and since their players can't use the skill in games, many don't want to "waste" the time in practice.

Gosselin considers that thinking to be misguided.

"It doesn't have to be rock 'em, sock 'em type hockey, but it has to be working on angling and body positioning," he says.

"Once we master those types of skills, our players are going to be much more confident in their play and more stable on the ice. Along with stability comes confidence, and if you have a confident hockey player he's going to excel."

All it takes is a little creativity on the part of coaches to introduce these concepts through the use of small-area games.

"It's just creating that environment in practice that encourages that competitiveness," says Roger Grillo, a disciple of Bill Beane, the small-games guru from Middlebury College.

"People look at checking as hitting, but it's not about that at all. It's really about trying to win back the possession of the puck. The game is still going to be physical and there's still going to be contact, but if we don't encourage that mentality at a younger age then they won't be prepared for it."

— Harry Thompson

**"WE NEED TO LOSE THAT FOOTBALL MENTALITY BECAUSE THAT'S NOT THE WAY THE GAME IS PLAYED."**

Northtown Center in Amherst, N.Y., is abuzz with activity as parents and grandparents watch and cheer as their kids play cross-ice. From Bob Schell's perspective, the cost of the hard dividers (approximately \$14,000 per set) is the best money his association has ever spent.

"They are well worth the investment. The boards have boosted our program," said Schell, the tournament director for Amherst Youth Hockey Association, whose 8 & Under program is operating at full capacity. "From the standpoint of Amherst Youth Hockey, the boards have been a home run."

It's not just Mites who are getting in on the fun. Squirt and Peewee players across the country regularly use the boards for small-area games.

At the Strongsville (Ohio) Youth Hockey Club, located just outside Cleveland, even

Bantam players have been using them on a regular basis, said Tom Filippou, president of the SYHC.

"When high school teams saw them being used with our older players, they asked to use them, too." ★

*Philip Colvin is a freelance writer based out of Walled Lake, Mich.*





