



Season Plan: Squirt Select 2015-2016

The squirt select team is an extension of the house program. The bulk of basic development, both in terms of skills and game sense, is developed during the twice-weekly practices and weekly games. There will be ample coordination between the house program and the select program; the head house coaches will also serve as coaches for the select team.

THE COACHES' COMMITMENT:

As coaches, we will ...

- ... coach in a positive manner with an emphasis on fair play
- ... act as role models on and off the ice
- ... be available to parents and skaters on and off the ice to discuss individual or team concerns
- ... make available, ahead of practices, full or summary practice plans
- ... ensure a safe environment for players
- ... offer a formal assessment of every skater during the year

EXPECTATIONS:

We expect that players and parents will ...

- ... adhere to the LIHA Parent and Player Code of Conduct
- ... practice good sportsmanship at all times
- ... make a good-faith effort to attend all games and practices, including early arrival at the rink, as necessary, for team discussions and off-ice "chalk talks"
- ... show up ready to give full physical and mental effort
- ... go to the coaches first if they have a problem related to the team. Issues with individual coaches should be handled by head coach Brian Reid, assistant coach Andrew Alpsteg, or coaching director Derek Reynolds
- ... maintain strong academic performance

PRIORITIES:



This year, we will focus on two simple priorities. The first is skill development. If foundational skills—skating, puckhandling, passing, shooting—are not developed at this level of play, many player will never adequately acquire them. USA Hockey is clear, in their “Windows of Trainability” research, that 8 to 10 is a year period for skill acquisition for both boys and girls. It provides the foundation for the more rapid development seen during the growth phase experienced between 11 and 13 (for girls) and 12 to 14 (for boys).

Second, we will make “fun” a priority. This is not “fun” in the sense of “let the kids do whatever they want,” but rather creating an environment where working hard is rewarded, success and progress is celebrated, and coaching is relentlessly positive.

Academic research into “fun” (yes: such a thing exists) found that, for youth sports, “trying your best,” “when a coach treats players with respect,” and “playing well together as a team” are the three single factors (out of 81) most closely linked to fun, above winning, above playing in tournaments, above getting complements from parents. And that will guide the way we orient the season: we want to create a positive environment when everyone feel the freedom to work hard, and work as a team.

PRACTICES:

In addition to the house program, squirt select will practice every weekend in which a) we are not playing a tournament and b) ice is available. We will let you know as practices are scheduled.

GAMES:

We intend to play in five tournaments: the three Midwest Amateur Hockey Association Tournaments, the Des Moines Blizzard Blast and the Omaha Joust. We may also consider additional late-season tournaments, depending on interest and availability. In combination with the house games, this should mean between 25 and 30 games per year, which is on the high end of USA Hockey recommendations.

The Midwest tournaments have not yet determined locations, but it’s likely they will be in Omaha, Wichita, and Lincoln.

To maximize development across the roster, we expect to field three forward lines and three defensive pairings, and to give all groups roughly equal ice time. Special teams units (power play/penalty kill) may be formed as the season progresses.

DEVELOPMENT APPROACH:

Given the focus on skill development, we will focus our time on drills that build foundational hockey abilities. By extension, that means we will limit the time spent on advanced offensive



and defensive concepts, especially at the beginning of the year. We will work on strategies such as breakouts and forechecking, but that will be in a broader context of skill development. There will also be a heavy emphasis on small-area games and battle drills to hone “hockey sense” and develop good hands and rink awareness.

We expect to break the season down into four sections:

Month One: Speed. From mid-October to mid-November, practices will emphasize speed and overspeed drills, in addition to form drills. This will build confidence in skating ability and create the environment for successful, high-pressure forechecking, backchecking, and crashing the net.

Month Two: Space. From mid-November to mid-December practices will be oriented toward the concept of “space.” On offense, this means finding open ice and making passes through open passing lanes. On defense, “space” will mean control of passing lanes and gap control (ensuring that the space between the D and the offensive player is neither so large that the offensive player isn’t forced to make a decision nor so small that the defensive player lacks options). These drills will directly impact our breakout approach.

Month Three: Scenarios. We will play three tournaments in five weeks between mid-December and mid-January, limiting our ice time. During this period, we will spend some time on “chalk talks” to detail positioning and approaches for various game situations.

Month Four: Strategies/Systems. In the final weeks of the season, ahead of our final tournaments, we will add additional structure to our approach, implementing specific strategies designed to increase our offensive and defensive efficiency and build a knowledge base for future hockey skills.