

# Role Models

## USA Hockey honors The Rinks, Jr. Ducks and Lady Ducks as Model Associations

By Chris Bayee

The Anaheim Ducks youth hockey program scored its most impressive hat trick yet, but the real winners are young players in the region.

Back on Aug. 16, USA Hockey announced that The Rinks, the Anaheim Jr. Ducks and the Anaheim Lady Ducks received American Development Model Association designations. It was the first time USA Hockey has honored three programs within an organization as such.

The Ducks youth program is the 21st honored overall across the country.

The acknowledgement means the programs have committed to implement programming dedicated to age-appropriate, age-specific skill development in accordance with USA Hockey's American Development Model (ADM) throughout the 8U, 10U and 12U classifications.

The recognition is an affirmation of the approaches The Rinks, the Jr. Ducks and the Lady Ducks have espoused throughout their histories, said **Art Trottier**, vice president of The Rinks and president of the Jr. Ducks.

"We have been doing a lot of it already, so we figured, 'Let's apply and see what happens,'" he said. "We have a good relationship with USA Hockey and they know what kind of organization we have."

The approach of The Rinks' massive in-house program, under the leadership of longtime hockey director **Rick Hutchinson**, the Lady Ducks, under longtime director **Kathy McGarrigle**, and the Jr. Ducks, under Trottier, and director of coaches **Craig Johnson** is simple: Grow the game by creating as many opportunities as possible for young people to experience it.

"We've been trying to grow the game for as long as we've existed (nearly 20 years)," Trottier said. "A lot of people thought we should have gone into (boys) AAA long ago, but we weren't willing to give up the grass roots."

McGarrigle has witnessed that first-hand as the Lady Ducks have grown from two teams to 13 in this millennium.

"It starts with Art," she said. "He was adamant that we were going to keep kids playing, grow the game and never give up the in-house, which is the basis for this, to have elite teams. That is the message from the top down, to provide kids incredible opportunities."

"Hutch' is the lynchpin. He built up the Jr. Ducks as well as running The Rinks programs. He and other coaches who don't get a lot of recognition – the **Barry Sherers**, **Jeff Noviellos** and **Dan Adams** of the world and others who continued coaching in-house and with the Jr. Ducks after their kids aged out."

The scale of the programs is impressive.

The Rinks alone has about 50 in-house teams, Hutchinson said, plus growing Hockey Initiation and Learn 2 Play programs that can include as many as 70 players per session.

The Jr. Ducks will have between 25 and 30 teams this season, and the Lady Ducks stand at 13 and counting.

"USA Hockey told us this is the perfect model for three clubs," Hutchinson said. "We're the first in the nation to get this honor. We knew we were doing the right thing all along. We're thankful for their acknowledgement."

"We want USA Hockey to be more involved in Orange County and beyond."

The ADM was years of research in the making, and its implementation has coincided with a surge in hockey's popularity and an increase in the amount of players of all levels, not the least of which is professional and college, in the United States.

"Obviously, our numbers in-house to the Jr. Ducks to the Lady Ducks, if there is any club capable of doing this, it's us," said Johnson, a longtime NHL player who spearheaded the Jr. Ducks' successful transition into Tier I hockey.

The Jr. Ducks have sent AAA teams to the USA Hockey Youth Nationals the past three years, and have had numerous Pacific District and CAHA state champions.

"USA Hockey will help us get better," Johnson added. "They've studied the top models from all over the world to come up with this, and for us to be able to implement this will only help."

"When they were here, they went through practice plans, and they do a great job with those – they keep kids moving and developing skills while having fun."

The youth programs will receive support from USA Hockey to further implement the ADM, including in-person coaches training, on-ice instruction and parent resources from USA Hockey's national staff. Additionally, the youth programs will receive equipment, signage and educational support from

USA Hockey.

That also will augment The Rinks' wildly popular Learn to Play and Hockey Initiation programs.

For all the programs have accomplished, it might be just the tip of the iceberg for the teams with a webbed foot on their jerseys.

"When The Rinks' four-sheet facility is built in the Great Park, think about the impact of that," McGarrigle said. "It could double our participation."

"We could not do this without (Anaheim Ducks owners) **Henry** and **Susan Samueli's** support and passion for growing the game."

The synergy from the top down in the Ducks organization is making a deep impression, McGarrigle added.

"Whether you play for The Rinks, the Jr. Ducks or the Lady Ducks, every player gets two Ducks jerseys," she said. "It could be the first game you've played or you could be a AAA player who's played 400 games. Regardless, you can say, 'I'm a Duck.'"

"That speaks volumes about the growth we've had and how we're making progress on the task of how do we get people to love the game for the rest of their lives."


The honor is humbling, but the organization's leaders say it only adds fuel to make them work even harder going forward. They know what's at stake.

"I'm always looking over my shoulder because we've got to keep improving," McGarrigle said.

Added Hutchinson: "We want to continue to do skill development and training the right way. We're not putting an emphasis on numbers. We want to teach these youngest players agility, athleticism and complement the values their families are teaching."

Johnson said the honor also ups the ante for the coaches.

"As a club, we can always get better," he said. "As coaches, we can help players even more. We need the buy-in to what USA Hockey is giving us. When everyone is on the same page, we can do great things."

The Rinks-Jr. Ducks-Lady Ducks triumvirate becomes the third organization in California to be honored as a Model Club Association by USA Hockey, joining the San Jose Jr. Sharks and the Wildcats Hockey Club. 



As the 21st USA Hockey program to be deemed an American Development Model Association, the Anaheim Ducks youth program has shown the country what it means to develop its players and to keep "doing the right thing," according to The Rinks hockey director Rick Hutchinson. Photo/Joe Naber