



USA HOCKEY, INC

Points of Emphasis 2021 Through 2025 Seasons

The goal of USA Hockey is to promote a safe and positive playing environment for all participants while continuing to focus on skill development and enjoyment of the sport. All officials, coaches, players, parents, spectators and volunteers are encouraged to observe these “Points of Emphasis” when participating in the sport of ice hockey.

Fair Play and Respect

Fair play and respect are the backbone of any successful amateur sports program. In order for a positive environment to be created, it is imperative that all participants and spectators have respect for all players, coaches, officials, administrators, spectators and the sport of hockey. Hockey is a game demanding high levels of concentration and skill. Taunting or unsportsmanlike conduct directed at opponents or officials will not be tolerated.

USA Hockey does not tolerate any abusive behavior, including racial and other derogatory slurs directed at players, coaches and officials. All participants are reminded that any language that is hateful or discriminatory in nature will be penalized with an automatic Match Penalty.

Abuse of officials is a continuing problem at all levels of play, and in all youth sports, and as a result the retention of officials has become a significant issue that affects the quality and number of available officials. USA Hockey is committed to taking a leadership role in this area and has in place a Zero Tolerance Policy towards unsportsmanlike behavior. Officials are required to strictly enforce all actions that are deemed to be abusive in nature in an effort to change the culture of what is deemed to be acceptable behavior when it comes to respect for officials.

Intimidation tactics have no place in ice hockey. These tactics include any contact to the head of the opponent, checking from behind and late body checks to an opponent who is no longer in control of the puck. Officials are instructed to enforce these rules to a high standard and assess the appropriate penalty when these actions occur. In addition, officials are expected to strictly enforce any avoidable contact occurring after the whistle – including during scrum situations around the goal.

In Competitive Contact categories, legal competitive contact shall be allowed and players allowed to compete using proper body position skills. However, any deliberate body check shall be penalized accordingly. If a body check is delivered for the purpose of intimidation, punishment or to a vulnerable or defenseless opponent, a major plus game misconduct penalty should be assessed to the offending player.

In Body Checking categories, the primary focus of the check shall be to gain possession of the puck and officials should strictly penalize any illegal actions such as boarding, charging, cross checking, and a late body check to a player who is no longer in control of the puck.

The responsibility is on the player delivering the check to avoid forceful contact (minimize impact) to a vulnerable or defenseless player who is no longer in control of the puck.

Proper body checking technique starts with stick on puck, therefore the stick blade of the player delivering the check must be below the knees.

Players are encouraged to develop a deep sense of respect for all (opponents and officials) while endeavoring to enjoy the sport and improve their playing ability. Each player is expected to use proper skill and technique when engaging in any type of physical contact.

Coaches are responsible for instructing their players to play the sport in a safe and sportsmanlike manner. To that end, coaches are directed to teach only those skills necessary to allow for proper and legal competitive contact.

Officials should be diligent and confident when officiating the sport. Each official should enforce all playing rules fairly and respectfully with the safety of the players and the best interest of the game in mind. Players must be held accountable for dangerous and illegal actions with the proper enforcement of the rules at all times.

Spectators are encouraged to support their teams while showing respect for all players, coaches, officials and other spectators.

Standard of Play and Rule Emphasis

USA Hockey will continue to observe the Standard of Play and Rule Emphasis for restraining fouls adopted in June 2006. The goal is to reduce restraining infractions in the game, allowing the skill levels of the participants to determine the outcome of a game and to increase participant enjoyment.

USA Hockey will also continue to emphasize the Body Checking Standard of Play and Rule Emphasis adopted in 2011 as part of its effort to create a safe environment for all participants. The goal is to enhance player skill development by eliminating intimidating infractions designed to punish the opponent. Proper enforcement of this standard will improve the proper skill of legal body checking or legal competitive contact at all levels of play.

Conclusion

Hockey should be enjoyed by all participants. To that end, all participants and spectators should observe a level of personal behavior that demonstrates respect for all. USA Hockey will continue to increase awareness among all officials and coaches with regard to these Points of Emphasis and the Standard of Play and Rule Enforcement.



Standard of Play and Rules Emphasis – Body Checking

Through the standard of rules enforcement, our game will continue to allow the opportunity for improved skill development and a more positive hockey environment for all participants. The mission of USA Hockey is clear; through this new initiative a greater emphasis will be placed on skating, puck possession and the proper use of the body to establish position and legally gain a competitive advantage.

The goal of the enforcement standard is to create an environment that enhances player skill development by reducing intimidating infractions designed to punish the opponent. This standard is designed to improve the proper skill of legal body checking or competitive contact at all levels of play and will not remove the physical component from the game. A player using a body check or competitive contact/body position (competitive contact classifications) to gain a competitive advantage over the opponent should not be penalized as long as it is performed within the rules. The focus of the body check must be to gain possession of the puck.

The principles of the body checking enforcement standard include the following:

- The purpose of a body check is to gain possession of the puck.
- Proper body checking technique starts with stick on puck, therefore the stick blade of the player delivering the check must be below the knees.
- Only the trunk (hips to shoulders) of the body shall be used to deliver a body check.
- The check must be delivered to the trunk (hips to shoulders) and directly from in front or the side of the opponent.
- Players who use their physical skills and/or anticipation and have a positional advantage shall not lose that advantage provided they physically engage with the opponent within the rules.
- Players will be held accountable for acts of an intimidating or dangerous nature.
- The onus is on the player delivering the check to avoid placing a vulnerable or defenseless opponent in danger of potential injury.

Enforcement Standard – These penalties are to be called with very strict enforcement.

BODY CHECKING (Competitive Contact Classifications)

A player cannot deliver a body check to any player while participating in a competitive contact classification.

Examples include:

- Making intentional physical contact with an opponent with no effort to legally play the puck.
- using overt hip, shoulder or forearm contact with the opponent to physically force them off the puck.
- physically impeding the progress of the opponent with hips, shoulders or torso without establishing competitive contact and making an attempt to gain possession of the puck.

BOARDING

A player cannot commit any infraction, including body checking, for the purpose of intimidation or punishment that causes their opponent to go dangerously or excessively into the boards. Examples include:

- accelerating through the check to a player who is in a vulnerable or defenseless position off of the boards resulting in the opponent going dangerously into the boards.
- driving an opponent excessively into the boards with no intent to gain possession of the puck.
- any other infraction (tripping, cross-checking, charging etc.) that causes the opponent to go dangerously and excessively into the boards.

CHARGING

A player cannot take more than two strides or travel an excessive distance to accelerate through a body check for the purpose of punishing the opponent. Examples include:

- running or jumping into the opponent to deliver a check.
- accelerating through a check for the purpose of punishing the opponent.
- skating a great distance for the purpose of delivering a check with excessive force.

CHECKING FROM BEHIND

A player cannot deliver a body check to an opponent directly from behind, or diagonally from behind. The onus is on the player delivering the check to not hit from behind. Examples include:

- body checking or pushing an opponent from behind directly into the boards or goal frame or in open ice.

CROSS-CHECKING

A player cannot use the shaft of the stick between the two hands to forcefully check an opponent with no portion of the stick blade on the ice. Examples include:

- when a player in front of the goal uses the shaft of the stick and extension of the arms to contact an opponent in a dangerous manner to create space.
- when a player uses the shaft of the stick and extension of the arms to contact an opponent in a dangerous manner who is protecting the puck along the boards.

HEAD CONTACT

A player cannot contact an opponent in the head, face or neck, including with the stick or any part of the players body or equipment. The onus is on the player delivering the check, regardless as to size differential, to not make contact in the head/neck area of the opponent. Examples include:

- when a body check is delivered with any part of the body that makes direct contact with the head or neck area.
- using of the forearm or hands to deliver a check to the head or neck area of the opponent.

ROUGHING

A player cannot use the hands, stick or extension of the arms to body check an opponent or deliver a late body check to a player who is not in control of the puck. Examples include:

- intentionally physically engaging with an opponent who does not have possession or control of the puck or when there is no effort to gain possession of a puck.
- delivering a late check to a player who has already relinquished control of the puck by a pass or shot. This is oftentimes referred to as “finishing” the check.
- any avoidable contact after the whistle shall be penalized strictly, including scrum situations around the goal or along the boards. Officials are instructed to assess an additional penalty to those players acting as the aggressor or who instigates any contact after the whistle.

SUMMARY

All USA Hockey members must demonstrate awareness and support for the application, spirit and the respect of the rules in order for continued improvement in the game of hockey. At the same time, it is important to remember that:

- a player is entitled to use proper body position and competitive contact in all age classifications in order to gain a competitive advantage.
- players are allowed to physically engage with an opponent using their strength and balance as long as their primary focus is to gain possession of the puck.
- in classifications where body checking is allowed, the focus of the body check must be to gain possession of the puck.
- proper body checking technique starts with stick on puck, therefore the stick blade of the player delivering the check must be below the knees.



Standard of Play and Rules Emphasis – Restraining Fouls

Through the standard of rules enforcement, our game will continue to allow the opportunity for improved skill development and a more positive hockey environment for all participants. The mission of USA Hockey is clear; through this initiative a greater emphasis will be placed on skating, puck possession and the proper use of the body to establish position and a competitive advantage.

The goal of the enforcement standard is to reduce restraining infractions in the game and not to remove legal body checking or competitive contact. A body check or using competitive contact/body position (competitive contact classifications) to gain a competitive advantage over the opponent should not be penalized as long as it is performed within the rules.

The principles of the continued enforcement standard include the following:

- The use of the stick will be limited to only playing the puck, and therefore the stick blade should be below the knees when involved in any physical engagement.
- The stick will not be allowed to in any way impede a player's progress.
- The use of a free hand/arm will not be allowed to grab or impede a player's progress.
- Players who use their physical skills and/or anticipation and have a positional advantage shall not lose that advantage as a result of illegal acts by the opponent.
- Players will be held accountable for acts of an intimidating or dangerous nature.

Enforcement Standard – These penalties are to be called with very strict enforcement.

HOOKING

A player cannot use their stick against an opponent's body (puck carrier or non-puck carrier) to gain a positional advantage. Examples include:

- using the stick to tug or pulls on the body, arms or hands of the opponent which causes the space between the players to diminish.
- placing the stick in front of the opponent's body and locking on – impeding the opponent's progress or causing a loss of balance.
- placing the stick on the hand/arm that takes away the ability for the opponent to pass or shoot the puck with a normal amount of force.

TRIPPING

A player cannot use their stick on the legs or feet of an opponent in a manner that would cause a loss of balance or for them to trip or fall. Examples include:

- placing the stick in front of the opponent's legs for the purpose of impeding progress, even if on the ice, with no effort to legally play the puck.
- placing the stick between the legs of the opponent (can opener/corkscrew) that causes a loss of balance or impedes the progress of the opponent.

HOLDING

A player cannot wrap their arms around an opponent or use a free hand to clutch, grab or hold the stick, jersey or body on the opponent in a manner that impedes their progress. Examples include:

- wrapping one or both arms around the opponent along the boards in a manner that pins them against the boards and prevents them from playing the puck or skating.
- grabbing the opponent's body, stick or sweater with one or both hands.
- using a free arm/hand to restrain or impede the opponent's progress.

INTERFERENCE

A player cannot use their body ("pick" or "block") to impede the progress of an opponent with no effort to play the puck, maintain normal foot speed or established skating lane. Examples include:

- intentionally physically engaging with an opponent who does not have possession or control of the puck.
- using the body to establish a "pick" or "block" that prevents an opponent from being able to chase a puck carrier.
- reducing foot speed or changing an established skating lane for the purpose of impeding an opponent who is in pursuit of the puck.

SLASHING

The use of the stick will be limited to only playing the puck. Any stick contact, as a result of a slashing motion, to the hands/ arms or body of the opponent will be strictly penalized. In addition, hard slashes to the upper portion of the stick (just below the hands) of an opponent, with no attempt to legally play the puck, shall also be penalized.

SUMMARY

All USA Hockey members must demonstrate awareness and support for the application, spirit and the respect of the rules in order for continued improvement in the game of hockey. At the same time, it is important to remember that:

- a player is entitled to the ice they occupy as long as they are able to maintain their own foot speed and body position between opponent and puck.
- players are allowed to physically engage with an opponent using their strength and balance as long as their primary focus is to gain possession of the puck.

CONCLUSION

Coaches are expected to teach proper skills and hold their players accountable for illegal and dangerous actions, regardless as to whether they are properly penalized, or not.

Parents are expected to support the decisions of the officials and support the coaches in teaching the proper skills in a safe and positive environment.

Officials shall enforce a strict penalty standard according to the guidelines that have been established.

Players are expected to compete within the playing rules.

Administrators are expected to hold players, coaches, officials and parents accountable for their actions in an effort to promote a safe and positive environment for all participants.

All members of USA Hockey share an equal responsibility to ensure the integrity of the game is upheld. The onus to incorporate change is not only on the officials, but also on administrators, coaches, parents and players, as well.