

Hi Folks-

There are some questions that have come up regarding our decision to have a AA/A team and A/B team at the Peewee level next season. Below are some common questions that have come up regarding that decision. Please read.

We've had AA teams in the past at DAHA and though the teams were competitive it didn't grow our association and, in fact, turned some of our families away from hockey altogether. How is the landscape different today than previously at DAHA? What are we doing differently to ensure success of both programs?

We could write a book on how not to run an organization based on our past decisions regarding player development... and it would accomplish nothing. It's in the past and that's where it should stay.

We currently have a player development model that adheres to the USA Hockey Athletic Development Model or ADM. Based on our results it is working. We shouldn't change that – only tweak it to make it even better. By tiering our Peewee program, we are following USA Hockey's model of tiering their associations (AAA, AA, A, BB, B). Additionally, we are following the examples of the successful high school programs in the UP – Marquette, Houghton, Sault Ste. Marie, Calumet – which all have tiered associations.

The bottom line is this – regardless of team classification - we need to provide the very best player and the very worst player in our organization an equal opportunity to improve.

-Our station-based (hockey skill) practices which include skating edgework, and small area games provide that opportunity.

-We need to add some system-based practices on the weekends for our peewee and bantam aged players. Those will be provided to all players at those age groups.

-We are committed to getting to a 4:1 (practice: game) ratio as per USA Hockey's ADM. That breaks down to 100 practice hours and 25 games approximately. That ratio will be applied to all teams regardless of classification.

How will practices be handled – together/separate?

We will continue to follow the USA ADM which utilizes station-based practices and small area games. Last year we were able to accommodate the squirts, peewees, and bantams at the same time. Depending on our numbers we may have to adjust those practices to fit all those players on one sheet of ice, but expect all peewees and bantams to practice together and receive the same practice opportunities.

Additionally, we will be providing our players with systems-based practices – usually held on weekends- for our peewee and bantam teams. These will be run by the coaching staffs from both teams and made available to all players.

To summarize, all players- regardless of team- will be provided the same practice opportunities.

Can we provide the ice time for two Peewee teams with the increase in Mites?

The projected numbers will be:

Bantams -7, Peewees (including out of town players) -28, Squirts -16, Mites – 40

We can run a practice with 50 combined squirts, peewees, bantams but that is a max number. That's 6 stations of 8-9 players. Any more than that and you won't have players getting enough reps which defeats the purpose of the stations. When we separate for SAG's (Small Area Games) we would probably have to divide into 3 groups of 15-18.

We may need to get creative with practice times.

We can accommodate the same numbers for a Mite practice.

Will our B team be competitive?

The easy answer is that it depends on how each player develops. Using our player development model (read: USA Hockey's Athletic Developmental Model _ADM), we feel that all of our players improved last year. Our Peewees were competitive last year with 10 skaters – 7 of which were first year peewees. So we would expect that next year's team, playing a similar schedule, would be competitive.

When will tryouts be for the AA team?

Tryouts for most of the Upper Peninsula's AA teams occur in early July.

Who is selecting the team?

Tryouts will be run by our current coaching staff on the ice. Evaluators from outside our association will be evaluating those players and providing feedback to the coaches regarding player rankings.

How much travel will there be for each of the teams?

We can expect that we would follow a CUP league schedule and an NIHL schedule. Not sure that there's a big difference in either schedule in terms of travel.

Who will be coaching the teams?

Practices will be run by the peewee and bantam coaching staffs combined.

Can my son/daughter move up if they progress as the year proceeds?

Once the teams are picked after tryouts those teams are set. However, USA hockey rosters must be finalized by December 31st. Technically, there exists an opportunity for a player to "move up or down" based on performance or to replace an injured player but those events are highly unlikely.

How many players on each team?

It's hard to say in March how many players will be trying out in the fall at each age group.

At the Mite level with the cross ice games teams of 8 are probably ideal. We expect to have around 40 mites in our program next year which would be 5 teams of 8 players.

Generally speaking, having teams that have 3 forward lines (9), 3 sets of defensemen (6), and 2 goalies are ideal. That's 17 players per team.

At the Squirt level, we had 18 on last year's team which was not ideal but we made it work. Based on current numbers we will have a slightly smaller team next year – around 16.

At the Peewee level, we played with 11 last year (10 skaters and 1 goalie). Again, not ideal, but we made it work. We expect to have 23 skaters next year from our organization at the peewee level. Opening up tryouts to form an A or AA team would likely add 4-6 players. We would expect to have two teams of 13-15 players.

Will the DAHA player development model draw outside AA kids to build up the roster?

First, it's not the DAHA model. It's the USA Hockey Athletic Development Model (ADM)- we're following the ADM like every other association that is part of USA Hockey should. It's up to those families to decide if they want to follow the ADM or not. Let's not try to be smarter than the folks at USA Hockey.

Yours in Hockey,
Coach Murv