



## CAHA STRATEGIC PLAN & ACTION STEPS



# USAH ADM 6U & 8U AGE GROUP GUIDELINES & RECOMMENDATIONS

## **GUIDELINES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE TO GAME RATIOS, GAME DAYS OR GAMES, AND GEOGRAPHIC TRAVEL**

**Why is CAHA recommending a certain amount of game days or days for youth hockey's age groups?** Our goal is to increase the number of players playing hockey in the Carolinas and this can be done through attracting more players and retaining more existing players. Right now our retention rate after 10U is flat and then declines and we believe this is in part due to too many games which negatively impacts the optimum practice to game ratio. Retention is also impacted by the value that families get out of hockey and in many cases the value equation is skewed because families are spending a large amount on travel expenses to play games. USA Hockey ADM Model recommends a specific amount of game days or games for each age group. We want to clearly communicate these to the Associations and recommend that they are followed. Ideally, we work to improve practice to game ratios especially at the 10U and 12U age groups where skill development needs to be maximized.

**What difference does it make if we play more games?** There are several reasons why ADM specifies how many games each age group should play. First, 1 practice delivers as much skill development as 11 games. Skill development is optimized when players have a 3:1 practice to game ratio so moving towards an optimum number of games at an age group may free up time to add practice time which increases development. Second, we want to provide more value to families. Playing games is much more expensive than practice. For example, 1 game costs approximately 50-100% more than 1 practice. If a team exchanged 5 games for practices, they could get 7-10 more practices and exponentially more skill development.

**Why geographic guidelines and recommendations by age group and level?** We want to encourage Associations to provide more value to parents. Some travel outside of CAHA and overnight is fun and a positive experience. Too much travel and overnights increase the overall cost of playing hockey and lowers the value received by families. Over time, we see burnout when families spend too much time and money traveling at the 10U and 12U age groups.

**Will the CHL be more competitive?** We hope so. We are encouraging more local play so if all teams play in the CHL, teams should be able to get more games in the Carolinas against a greater number of competitive teams. Currently there are teams that do not play in the CHL because they feel it is not competitive.

**How will CAHA keep Associations accountable for implementing the new guidelines and recommendations?** First, we hope that the Associations will do their best to adopt these Best Practices. They are guidelines and recommendations – not mandates. We believe this is an educational process where CAHA and USA Hockey can help Associations be more effective in delivering the best practices of skill development and the best hockey programs possible. We are committed to working with the Associations to help them achieve this and feel that these USA Hockey ADM Guidelines and Recommendations are the best practices for a great hockey experience. We will also have a pre-season ADM Program registration of teams via SportsEngine that will outline the specifics of each team in every program.

## 6U & 8U AGE GROUPS

The key principles for 6U/8U are to focus on fun, engagement, active practices, and age-appropriate training which includes station-based practices to teach skills and concepts. This is where the “Hockey for Life” seed is planted and fun should not be underestimated. If it is not consistently fun at this age, the novelty of the sport will wear off and players may eventually quit. House teams maybe be formed but standings and scores are not kept. 8U Player Development programs may be offered that include skill development sessions and 8U Player Development teams. These programs & teams must be open to all players via open registration with no tryouts.

|           |            |                            |            |                        |
|-----------|------------|----------------------------|------------|------------------------|
| <b>6U</b> | 24x36 nets | Cross-Ice or 1/4-Ice Games | Blue pucks | House only + Jamborees |
| <b>8U</b> | 36x48 nets | Cross-Ice Games            | Blue pucks | House only + Jamborees |

- **Practice to Game Ratio** - strive to attain a 3:1 Practice to Game ratio – ideally a rotation of 3 practices and 1 game. Each practice is 50-60 minutes in length. The use of small area games can be an effective way to increase skills and provide additional learning through playing the game. Where a 3:1 ratio is not possible, use a maximum of 16-20 Game Days and the balance of ice for 50-60 practice hours for a 1.5 or 2:1 ratio.
- **Game Format** – 6U games are played 4v4 in the cross-ice format with no goalies. Associations may also want to experiment with the ¼-ice format that has been used in some Affiliates. 8U games are played 4v4 in cross-ice format with players rotating through the goalie position.
- **Goaltending** - 6U uses no goalies except if players want to try the position. The goaltending focus at 8U is to have goalie equipment available to try the position and eventually convert to full-time goalies. However, all goalies should play out and not play goalie full-time at this age. Players should rotate playing the position on a regular basis – try goalie with quick change gear.
- **Equipment** - Requirements for 6U: 24 x 36 nets, blue pucks, cross-ice games. Requirements for 8U: 36x48 nets, blue pucks, cross-ice games.
- **Skill Levels** - The use of Advanced, Intermediate, Beginner levels are encouraged to have players play with players of similar skill. 8U teams may be formed for play in House leagues. No standings are kept. Team rosters should be 9-12 players.
- **8U Development** - Associations may offer an open-registration “8U Development” program that may include additional skill development sessions and the formation of teams that would play other Association’s 8U Development teams. No tryouts are allowed for these teams except to separate players into Beginner and Intermediate/Advanced groups of teams. If only 1 team is formed, all skill level players are allowed to play on these teams. These players are not “selected” as an All-Star or Select team – it is an open registration for all players who wish to participate.
- **Jamborees** - 8U scramble cross-ice or team Jamborees may be held by any Association at any time – in partnership with CAHA or separately. These Jamborees must be open to all players or teams in CAHA, use 36 x 48 nets and blue pucks, rotate goalies and no winners/losers or scorekeeping. We encourage the use of Student Referees to help with referee development. Teams may only attend Jamborees that are scramble, cross-ice, use 36 x 48 nets, and use blue pucks.

### ADM Guidelines & Recommendations

| Age Group                    | Level        | Practices (2:1 to 3:1 Ratio) | Game Days | Off-Ice    | Game Format        | Geography  |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------------------------|-----------|------------|--------------------|--|
| <b>6U</b>                    | House only   | 50-60                        | 16-20     | 1 per week | Cross-Ice or ¼ ice | May participate in Scramble Jamborees within CAHA  |
| <b>8U</b>                    | House only   | 50-60                        | 16-20     | 1 per week | Cross-Ice          | May participate in Scramble Jamborees within CAHA  |
| <b>8U Player Development</b> | Open Signups | 60-75                        | 20-25     | 1 per week | Cross-Ice          | 8U Scramble Jamborees within CAHA. Team Jamborees with travel permit to GA, TN, VA, MD, DC only. |

## 8U AGE GROUP FAQs FOR ASSOCIATIONS & PARENTS

### Can you explain how the 8U Development Program differs from 8U Select program?

One of the fundamental development principles for 8U is that all players receive the same opportunity for development – good coaching, station-based practices, same amount of practice, same number of games. However, we recognize that some Associations and families want to add more development to their programs for those players who want more. The 8U Development Program is designed to do this. Associations may offer additional development – more practices, opportunity to play in Jamborees (team or scramble) and attend a tournament. The important distinction between 8U Select and an 8U Development Program is that the **8U Development Program must be offered to any player or family that wants to participate**. If Associations then want to attend a team Jamboree or tournament, they must offer this opportunity to ALL players. For Associations with more than 1 team of players, it is acceptable to separate players into teams from the skill groups used in practices. However, ALL players must then have the opportunity to attend the same number of Jamborees or tournaments. Associations should work together to match up 8U Development teams so teams play other teams of equal ability and ALL players have the opportunity to play in as many Jamborees or tournaments as any other player.

### What are the advantages of practicing in small areas and playing cross-ice games?

The USA Hockey Red, White, and Blue program is based on a model of practicing and playing hockey across the ice surface as compared to practicing and playing along the full length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing and playing model actually has been around for as long as the game has been played. When players played on a pond did they use an ice surface 200 x 85 feet? No, they played in a small area that developed and sharpen their skills without the rules of off-sides, icing, penalties, face-offs, or even positional play. Hockey sense and hockey instincts were developed. This model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations and by the world's best players for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been shown that children who begin their hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience and develop a better base of skills as they progress through our sport.

### What are some of the “Best Practices” for maximizing the development of players at 8U and younger?

The key principles for 6U/8U are to focus on fun, engagement, active practices, and age-appropriate training which include station-based practices to teach skills and concepts. This is where the “Hockey for Life” seed is planted and fun should not be underestimated. If it is not consistently fun at this age, the novelty of the sport will wear off and players may eventually quit. Players need to have a foundation of skill, fun, competition, and age-appropriate training. Keeping score, travel teams, winning & losing, and adult-sized playing surfaces and skill development will minimize development and fun over the long-term. Without a basis of fun and skill development at the younger ages, players have a higher rate of leaving the sport – this is something we are addressing with our approach to 8U. In your program you should see:

- Focus on fun, engagement, and development with no lines, no laps, no lectures
- No time spent at the board drawing up drills and plays
- Lots of movement of players – no one standing around
- Competitive environment at individual level – puck battles, competing in games, doing their best
- blue pucks and smaller nets (24x36 for 6U and 36x48 for 8U) should be used for age-appropriate development.
- a 2:1 or ideally 3:1 practice to game ratio
- station-based practices in small areas
- competition that is focused on individual competition like competing for the puck
- small games in practice for learning hockey sense and hockey concepts like puck support
- 4v4 or 3v3 cross-ice format in games

### Why does the ADM call for 6U & 8U to use a smaller surface for games?

Like other sports, we are fitting the playing environment to fit the physical size of our kids. By doing this, kids get to play a version of the real hockey game that is actually more comparable in key areas that a full ice game is for kids on this size. Physical contact is increased, repetition of the most important skating and puck control skills are increased and the environment is better suited to the cognitive development of the players.

### How will my child develop competitiveness if no scores are kept & there are no winners or losers?

Fostering a competitive environment is an important part of a child's development. It is important for the games and practices at the 8U level to foster a competitive environment for all the players involved. Although we do not keep score or

track of winning and losing at this age, this does not mean that we do not encourage competitiveness. At this age, competitiveness must be fostered and enhanced at an individual level. Players should be encouraged to be the very best they can be, to battle for the puck, and to compete hard in every cross-ice game, competition and practice.

**I'm concerned about my 8U player not being able to compete for a spot on a travel team. This sounds like "everyone gets a trophy" and isn't life about competition?**

Life is competitive – **adult** life. This is where the ADM and LTAD focuses on the development of the child. Imposing adult-level competitive philosophies on young children has been shown to reduce fun, hurt skill development, and reduce retention of players playing our sport. Competitiveness grows and develops in kids. As an adult, your competitiveness is fully developed. For example, you may be upset about a loss for a day or 2 as you work through your competitive drive and feelings. A player may be just as disappointed about the loss but they recover in 5-10 minutes. It doesn't stay with them like an adult. The approach to competition is also different. At 6U and 8U, competition is learned by children at the individual level and competition is learned by competing for the puck, body contact, working hard, being the best they can be. Keeping score, playing on teams, travel hockey, and winning & losing are concepts that are important but are more appropriate at the 10U and 12U age groups. When we push the wrong type of competitiveness on kids at too early an age, players don't have as much fun, learn less, are less engaged, actually become less competitive, and eventually quit the sport.

**My 8U child likes to play on a team. Will they still be able to?**

8U players may play on teams in their House leagues and we are forming the 8U Development Program for Associations that want to offer 8U players additional development opportunities. One of the key principles at this age group is that all players should have the opportunity to get more development opportunities as we do not know who the best players will be in the future. The 8U Development Program can offer additional practices and a team format to play in 8U Team Jamborees. However, these are open to any player and there are no tryouts. If there are enough players, 2 levels of teams may be formed – Advanced/Intermediate and Beginner. Both the levels should receive the same amount of practice, skill development, games, and coaching.

**Why can't my 8 year old use full size nets and black pucks?**

Age-Appropriate Development is very important at the younger ages. The nets and pucks should be at the right size for the age group. For 6U we have blue pucks and 24x36 nets and cross-ice games, at 8U we have blue pucks and 36x48 nets and cross-ice games, at 10U we use black pucks and full-size nets but we are moving to half-ice 4v4 games, and at 12U and older, players move to full-ice games.

**Will players compete against other players of a similar ability?**

One of the most important ADM principles is the grouping of players of like ability. At 8U this is a cornerstone of a player's development. It is important in both practice and in cross-ice game competition for players to be grouped by similar ability whenever possible.