

**Learn to Compete (18U and NTDP)**  
**Ages 15-18 female**  
**Ages 16-18 male**



### **USA Hockey Programs**

USA Hockey's member clubs can offer Tier 1 and Tier 2 and travel competitive teams, as well as Hockey for Life programs that meet each individual's ability and commitment at the 18 & Under classification. USA Hockey also runs national Player Development Camps for both 16 and 17-year-old boys and girls. USA Hockey also has its National Team Development Program at this level.

At the age of 17, players have the opportunity to be selected and compete with the U.S. National U18 Team, either through the national Player Development Camp or the National Team Development Program. The U18 age level is the initial age where the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF) holds an official world championship event.

### **Objective**

Prepare athletes for the competitive environment, continue to refine technical adaptability, ancillary skills and develop the physical attributes.

### **General Description of the Learn to Compete stage**

This is the time to optimize general athleticism and fitness and to begin to specialize in ice hockey. Training should be individualized to the athlete's particular needs in each facet of performance – technical, tactical, physical and mental, with the understanding that these areas are highly interdependent. During this stage, training volume and intensity increase, so incorporation of recovery methods and monitoring is important. The training season is longer, and event specific. Competitions and tournaments become more important and the focus starts to shift from development to performance. Athletes learn to prepare for competition, and learn to handle competitive pressures in any situation. This is the time to consolidate individual strengths and rectify weaknesses.

### **USA Hockey's Key Focus for this Stage**

- Refine adaptable technical abilities
- Gain confidence in a variety of competitive situations
- Good decision-making skills
- Make improvements in overall physical development and athleticism

### **Components of Athlete Development: USA Hockey Learn to Compete Stage**

#### **Technical Development**

- Refinement of skills at a high speed in all conditions
- Execution of technical ability must be performed in game situations

#### **Tactical Skills**

- Speed of transition from offense to defense and defense to offense
- Speed of decision making skills

## **Physical Development**

- Biological maturation is typically completed during this stage; however, some athletes may still be growing
- Fundamental movement skills should be incorporated into dynamic warm up and fun speed, agility and conditioning games
- Strength and Power Development: Programming will depend on training age. Most athletes have been exposed to strength training by this age. More advanced concepts can be applied if appropriate training age and qualified instruction such as eccentric-based training, complex training, velocity-based training and Olympic lifts and variations for power development.
- Plyometrics: High intensity plyometrics; multiple 2-foot hopping & jumping; 1-2x per week
- Speed: Maximal speed and acceleration; Strength training focused on maximal strength + explosive exercises; Complex training, plyometrics & Olympic lifts
- Agility: Primary focus on reactive agility (60%); incorporation of FMS (20%) and change of direction (20%) through warmups
- Conditioning: Acquisition of expertise through deliberate practice; combination of small-sided games, HIIT and repeat sprints
- Develop individualized programs for fitness, primary and secondary injury prevention or rehab, and recovery

## **Psychological Development**

- The athlete should have well-developed mental preparation skills, and should continue to refine these skills
- Competition becomes more important and athletes must learn to perform on demand
- Training and practice in mental preparation will help the athlete cope with the stresses associated with training, tournaments and selection, and will contribute to their overall development as competitive athletes
- Athletes should have input in setting training goals and priorities, and should be included in decision-making process
- Athletes are capable of self-coaching and should be encouraged to think for themselves, rather than relying solely on coach feedback

## **Ancillary Skills**

- Ensure that key support systems (fitness monitoring, recovery and regeneration, psychology, nutrition and health needs) are in place and integrated with the training program
- Regular, year-round strength & conditioning
- Athletes should refine and individualize their own ancillary capacities

## **Lifestyle**

- Refine the skills listed in the Train to Train stage
- Athlete assumes increasing responsibility for managing his/her competitive and training schedules, deadlines, registrations, etc.
- Athlete assumes responsibility for his/her own behavior as representative of USA Hockey, his/her club, state and country.

## Monitoring

- Most athletes have finished growing by this stage and are fully mature. Body mass and body composition can be monitored.
- Assessment of fitness and athleticism can continue to inform programming
- Athlete health and well-being and recovery should be monitored

## Training and Competitive Environment

<b>High Performance Track 18 &amp; Under</b>	
<b>Training/Competition Ratio</b>	60% training and 40% competition
<b>Training Volume</b>	5-6 times hockey per week. Session length of 60 to 90 minutes at 18 & Under level. 4-6 fitness/off-ice sessions per week.
<b>Total # of sessions</b>	~200+ total ice touches
<b># Practices</b>	140 – 150 practices
<b># Competitions</b>	50-55 games
<b>Training Year</b>	9-10 months/year
<b>Team Composition</b>	18 skaters (12 forwards, 6 defensemen) and 2 goalenders
<b>Team Structure</b>	Teams in these age groups can group players of like ability without restrictions
<b>Competition format</b>	18 & Under can play 20-minute stop-time period games
<b>Overall activity ratios</b>	60% hockey, 40% fitness
<b>Complementary Sports</b>	Athletes are encouraged to participate in outside sporting recreation

## Quality Coaching

### General Considerations

- Coaches must plan with regard to training volume and intensity, taking into consideration competition and rest and recovery
- Preparation must be detailed and well communicated
- Learning to compete within a team structure, placing team before self
- Intensity of training is high
- On- and off-ice decision-making skills are of a high priority during this stage
- Team play and accountability to the team are required
- Players must be able to transfer the decisions made in practice to competition
- Emphasis on speed of execution
- Emphasis on off-ice training

### Coach and Instructor Recommendations

- Coaches must all have the appropriate level of USA Hockey Coaching Education Program (CEP) certification and completed the following:
  - On-line coaching module for the age category being coached
  - Background check

- Completed the United States Center for Safe Sport online program
  - Current year membership registration with USA Hockey
- Additional CEP training and continuing education is encouraged for coaches working within USA Hockey's high performance program or any coach who wishes to improve their craft