AGES 8 AND UNDER
Long Term Athlete Development and the ADM

LESSON WORKBOOK

KEN MARTEL
INTRODUCTION

The American Development Model (ADM) is a nationwide initiative that provides local associations across the country with a blueprint for optimal athlete development that focuses on age-appropriate training utilizing long-term athlete development principles.

Recommendations have come from experts in ice hockey, child development, physical education and cognitive and emotional development. The ADM is about designing, implementing and committing to continual improvement of a world leading, age-appropriate training and competition model for kids. The ADM is about raising the bar for our players, coaches and administrators. We want our young players exposed to world class coaching at every level.

A PLAN FOR LONG-TERM ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

The ADM was endorsed by the USA Hockey Board of Directors at its 2009 Winter Meeting and has also been endorsed by the National Hockey League. The ADM furthers our growth and development efforts as it will provide our member associations, for the first time ever, an optimal development blueprint for youth players that will lead to a better experience for our current players and also help attract new players to our sport.

“It’s hard to put into words the excitement and buzz that has been and will continue to be generated by this new initiative. It will take time for local associations around the country to educate their constituents on the merits of adopting the American Development Model, but there’s no doubt that the principles of the program are right for kids.”

— Ron DeGregorio, USA Hockey President

As Americans, we are a competitive people and our country places a tremendous importance on winning. In some cases it is to our detriment, but there can be no doubt that our society rewards and cherishes excellence. In ice hockey, we have grown from our seat at the kids’ table to one with the grown-ups. As a hockey nation we are now competitive at every event that we enter. Yet for Americans, second best has never been good enough. Our enrollment numbers are the second most among all hockey-playing nations and yet we have not grown into our full potential.

The developmental system in the U.S. has evolved over time. Our current structure is not one that was planned; it is one that evolved into a multi-faceted organization with many different avenues. While diversity is one of our great attributes as a nation, a clear pathway to excellence has never been defined by USA Hockey. Over a decade ago, to address some of the issues within our system, USA Hockey took a bold step with the creation of the National Team Development Program (NTDP). The NTDP has raised the bar on elite player development within the United States. Ten years ago one rarely heard the word “development” within the hockey community, but now it is the buzz word. The NTDP has played an important role as we have grown into a challenger at each event. However, as Americans we are not content with second place and it is now time to move from challenger to champion.

Change is the only path that will move us towards our goal. As the old saying goes, “If you always do what you have always done, then you will always get what you have always got.”
USA Hockey started with a review of research that has taken place in child and athletic development around the globe. Elite performance studies from multiple sport bodies, governments as well as other endeavors such as music and the arts were evaluated. Through the review of current research, it was quickly concluded that to truly address player development, a completely new way of looking at USA Hockey’s structure must be undertaken. Critical development begins at a very early age. As children mature, they each progress during the same developmental stages through the growth and maturation process. Along this path, certain aspects of these stages must be addressed at the appropriate time intervals. Without developing skills and certain physical and mental attributes at the proper time, the long-term prospects of becoming a truly elite athlete are diminished.

Research has shown that we cannot just focus on a few older players; an encompassing strategy must be followed. As we evaluated the current research, variations of Istvan Balyi’s long-term athlete development (LTAD) principles are being employed around the globe by more than 100 government health ministries and sport National Governing Bodies. Within hockey, there is no doubt that countries like Sweden, Finland and the Czech Republic produce high-end NHL players. Their numbers are especially impressive when one considers the populations and player numbers from those counties. In each of those countries, long-term athlete development principles are at the core of their development model.

Long-term athlete development is a generic, conceptual framework for athlete development in sport that can be used as a basis on which to ‘re-align,’ or make more consistent, existing systems and structures. It has been developed by Istvan Balyi, an internationally recognized coach educator, and is based upon a consensus of evidenced research about how young people develop sporting ability, linking more closely the coaching and development of players to their physical and psychological growth.

The ADM is a long-term athlete development plan for the sport of ice hockey. It takes into consideration the guiding LTAD principles that are widely accepted around the globe. Consistent with LTAD, the ADM:

1. Integrates training, competition and recovery programming with relation to biological development and maturation.
2. Offers equal opportunity for recreation and competition.
3. Is participant/athlete centered; coach driven; and parents, officials, administration, sport medicine & sport science supported.

It should be recognized that much of LTAD is nothing new. The majority of the research on which it is based is widely accepted, and has been used to underpin physical education teaching for many years. The difference that LTAD brings is a ‘packaging’ of this theory for mass understanding and a mechanism for applying the theory to better integrate whole sports development systems (i.e. coaching, training, playing, competition, etc). It is also important that our USA Hockey membership understand that it is not just our hockey people that endorse a LTAD plan, but that sports science and development experts from around the globe endorse this model and are adopting this methodology for their own sports.
All young people follow the same pattern of growth and development, although there are significant differences between individuals in the timing and magnitude of these changes. In relation to physical activity, there are seven key phases of growth and development. The relevant ‘stage’ of the LTAD hockey model for each phase of growth and development is described below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Ages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood</td>
<td>Active Start</td>
<td>Males &amp; Females 0-6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late Childhood</td>
<td>FUNdamentals</td>
<td>Males 6-9 &amp; Females 6-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Learn to Train</td>
<td>Males 9-12 &amp; Females 8-11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Early Puberty)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence</td>
<td>Train to Train</td>
<td>Males 12-16 &amp; Females 11-15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Late Puberty)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>Learn to Compete</td>
<td>Males 16-18 &amp; Females 15-18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Adulthood</td>
<td>Train to Compete</td>
<td>Males 19-23 &amp; Females 18-21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adulthood</td>
<td>Train to Win</td>
<td>Males 19+ &amp; Females 18+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**LTAD Foundation of Research, Principles and Tools**

Long-term athlete development has at its foundation 10 different elements of sport science and child development research. When considering the structure of any athlete development program, these elements must also be considered.

**10 Year – 10,000 Hour Rule**

It takes years of organized practice to become an expert performer. Research shows this is true of developing any skill, such as learning to play an instrument or playing sport. This is sometimes referred to as the ‘10 year – 10,000-hour rule’ relating to the need to practice for three hours a day for 10 years. Many researchers believe this is just a minimum. The bottom line is that it takes an enormous amount of work and time to become an elite athlete. This is done through a diverse sports movement and sports skills background. Once this foundation is laid, it takes years of deliberate practice to develop an elite performer at the highest level.

A significant number of players that play in the NHL were never drafted. This means that, at 18 and 19 years of age, nobody was even willing to take a late-round chance on their potential to make it. Hockey is not an early specialization sport and our programs must include a long-term developmental pathway that provides opportunities for our elite players into their early 20s. This is why USA Hockey endorses the college hockey path, as it provides the widest range of developmental opportunity over time. Many players don’t reach their potential until their early to mid-20s.

**FUNdamentals**

All sports begin with basic fundamental movement and core sports skills. The ABCs of movement include agility, balance, coordination and speed, while core sports skills include running, jumping, skating and throwing. It has been shown that children who have a strong, broad-based foundation in the fundamental movements and sports skills from a variety of sports increase their potential for future success in sports. Whether this is confidence to lead a healthy and active life in sport or to become an elite athlete, this strong foundation in the fundamentals will help children reach their full potential. Without this foundation, children may never reach their genetic capacity.
Specialization
Sports are classified as either early or late specialization sports. An example of an early specialization sport is women’s gymnastics in which, due to growth, girls are potentially retiring from their sport at 14, 15 or 16 years of age. As with other contact/collision sports, ice hockey is classified as a late specialization sport. Hockey players don’t reach their full potential until after full growth maturity. Specialization at an early age limits children from acquiring a broad spectrum of athletic movements and skills that may limit or put a cap on their overall athletic potential. When players specialize too early they can create imbalances in musculature, increase the potential for burn out and limit their athletic potential by not developing a broad base of athletic movement skills.

“Young athletes who participate in a variety of sports have fewer injuries and play sports longer than those who specialize before puberty. Well-rounded, multi-sport athletes have the highest potential to achieve.”
— Journal of American Academy of Pediatrics

AAP Guidelines:
• Encourage athletes to strive to have at least one to two days off per week from competitive athletics, sports specific training and competitive practice (scrimmage) to allow them to recover both physically and psychologically.
• Encourage the athlete to take at least two to three months away from a specific sport during the year.

Windows of Optimal Trainability
There are identifiable stages during a child’s physical and psychological development that offer optimum opportunities to develop particular attributes, such as basic movement skills (agility, balance, coordination and speed), basic sports skills (running, jumping, throwing, skating and striking) and physical capacities (flexibility, endurance, and strength). Missing these optimum opportunities has been shown to significantly affect a child’s ability to reach his or her full potential.

In our current system, training in early years focuses on outcomes (winning) rather than the developmental process (optimal training). As Balyi states, “Damage done between ages 6-10 and 10-16 cannot be fully corrected (players/athletes will never reach their genetic potential) and national training or sport centers receiving mediocre athletes, regardless of funding and expertise, cannot recover from the ‘damages’ of earlier training.”

Elite player development and a sound structure at the 8 & Under level for broad-based skill development are not mutually exclusive. What do we currently produce in the U.S.? We have an over abundance of average players and very few truly elite players at the highest levels (NHL), especially when our numbers are taken into consideration. This is due to a lack of the proper focus on training through the appropriate ‘windows of optimal trainability.’
These critical windows provide accelerated adaptation to training and, if skipped or missed, decrease a child’s chance to reach his or her full potential. It must be kept in mind that all systems are always trainable, yet with smaller degrees of adaptation to training over time. In our current system, the window of opportunity on skills development (9-12) for male players is missed through over-competition and under-training.

These critical periods vary between individuals as each child is unique in his or her genetic makeup. While these critical periods follow general stages of human growth and maturation, scientific evidence shows that humans vary considerably in the magnitude and rate of response to different training stimuli at all stages. Some players may show potential for excellence at age 11, while others may not indicate their promise until age 15 or 16. Consequently, a long-term approach to player development is needed to ensure that players who respond slowly to training stimuli are not ‘shortchanged’ in their development.

The five trainable physical capacities and windows of optimal trainability are:

- **Stamina (Endurance):** The optimal window of trainability occurs at the onset of peak height velocity (PHV). This is more commonly known as the adolescent growth spurt. Aerobic capacity training is recommended before athletes reach PHV. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.

- **Strength:** The optimal window of trainability for girls is immediately after PHV or at the onset of the menarche, while for boys it is 12-to-18 months after PHV.

- **Speed:** For boys, the first speed training window occurs between the ages of 7 and 9 years and the second window occurs between the ages of 13 and 16. For girls, the first speed training window occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 years and the second window occurs between the ages of 11 and 13 years.

- **Skill:** The window for optimal skill training for boys takes place between the ages of 9 and 12 and between the ages of 8 and 11 for girls.

- **Suppleness (Flexibility):** The optimal window of trainability for suppleness for both genders occurs between the ages of 6 and 10. Special attention should be paid to flexibility during PHV, due to rapid growth.

Additional capacities have been identified that must also be considered throughout an athlete’s development and, in addition to the five physical capacities, make up a holistic approach to training.

- **Structure/Stature:** The height of a person before, during and after maturation can be utilized by a coach or parent. Tracking growth as a guideline for developmental age can allow for planning to take advantage of the critical ‘windows of optimal trainability.’

- **Psychology:** Sport is a physical and mental challenge. The ability to maintain high levels of concentration, yet remain relaxed with the confidence to succeed, is a skill essential to long-term performance in sport. This skill also has the potential to transcend sport and affect our everyday lives. To develop the mental toughness for success at the highest levels, training programs are required that address the specific gender and LTAD stage of players. The training programs should include key mental components identified by sport psychologists: concentration, confidence, motivation and handling pressure. As a player progresses through LTAD stages, the mental training aspect will evolve from having fun and respecting opponents; to visualization and self-awareness; to goal setting, relaxation, and positive self-talk. To master the mental challenge of sport, these basic skills are then tested in increasingly difficult competitive environments. Ultimately, the planning, implementation and refining of mental strategies for high-level competition will have a large impact on elite performance. Consequently, the mental training program is critical at all stages of LTAD, as dealing with success and failure will determine continuation in the game and physical activity in general.

- **Sustenance:** This category refers to all aspects of replenishing the body for sports and general health. It covers a wide range of topics from nutrition and hydration to rest and recovery. Fatigue, whether it comes from a single practice/competition or builds up over time through a lengthy schedule, can be combated through a proper lifestyle. Whether our children become elite athletes, or we look for better performance in school or just to lead a healthier life, we will all thrive with better education and following a plan that replenishes our physical and mental needs.
Long Term Athlete Development and the ADM

- **School**: Sports schedules must consider the demands placed upon children from an academic perspective. Education must be emphasized, and the demands of sport should complement the academic schedule, not conflict with it. The stress of class work, examinations, boyfriend and girlfriend issues, and school peer groups play a role in the fatigue and stress levels on our athletes. Coaches and parents must monitor these factors to balance the sports schedule to allow for maximum development both on the ice and in the classroom.

**Biological Age vs. Chronological Age**

Biological age should be considered through our development and identification process. As an example, one only need look at the number of early month birth dates that make up our Under-17 and Under-18 National Teams. Our current system forces players into a compete-to-win, ‘peak by the weekend’ system that rewards early maturing players who may not have the ability to be elite performers. Late developing players are excluded and cut, consequently leaving the sport or being segregated to a recreation program that limits their training opportunities. These late developers may have huge long-term potential but are eliminated from our system.

Currently, most athletic training and competition programs are based on chronological age. However, athletes of the same age between ages 10 and 16 can be four-to-five years apart developmentally. Thus, chronological age is a poor guide to segregate adolescents for competitions. Because hockey is a contact sport, early maturing players are favored within our youth structure. The late developer is eliminated when he or she may possess better long-term athletic ability.

Looking at the chart below, it is obvious that in the Canadian developmental system and ours, potential late month birth date players have been excluded from the high-performance track. It is highly unlikely that there are fewer players with long-term athletic potential born in the last quarter of the year than in the first quarter.
“Training Age” refers to the age at which athletes begin planned, regular, serious involvement in training. The tempo of a child’s growth has significant implications for athletic training because children who mature at an early age have a major advantage during the Training to Train stage compared to average or late maturers. However, after all athletes have gone through their growth spurt, it is often later maturers who have greater potential to become top athletes provided that they experience quality coaching throughout that period.

Not all players have the potential to become elite players. The American Development Model recognizes this by offering two levels of content from the Train to Train stage forward. The high performance content is aimed at those players who have been identified and who choose to attempt to be potential elite performers, while the standard content offers a reduced level of commitment more appropriate to the majority of players who will form the basis of club teams of the future. The split between the levels of content at the early part of the Train to Train stage are relatively small as it is deemed to be such an important stage in developing a broader base of potential elite players. However, the differentiation between hockey and other sports may necessitate the divergence at this stage. It is important to note that research suggests that there can be numerous players who follow the standard track through the Train to Train and into the Train to Compete stages who will have the potential to become elite performers. This is especially true if they have a diverse sports movement background through playing multiple sports during the FUNdamental and Learn to Train stages.
Periodization
Periodization is the practice of segmenting the calendar year into appropriate time intervals for preparation, competition and rest and recovery. Athletes at different stages of their development require different training plans to optimize their development through their growth and maturation. The science behind periodization has been used on the international stage with great success in many, many sports. Unfortunately, sometimes a sport’s traditions are placed in front of the athlete’s needs when planning a periodization schedule. This has an impact on maximizing the player’s development.

The Great One’s Message to Parents: Let Your Kids Have Fun
“In youth hockey, in most cases, it’s really important for kids to play other sports, whether it’s indoor lacrosse or soccer or baseball. I think what that does is two things. One, each sport helps the other sport. And then I think taking time off in the off-season - that three or four month window really rejuvenates kids so when they come back at the end of August, they’re more excited. They think, ‘All right, hockey’s back, I’m ready to go.’” — Wayne Gretzky.

Gretzky was a multi-sport athlete himself growing up, as he also excelled in baseball and lacrosse, quoted from “Great One’s Message to Parents: Let Your Kids Have Fun” (Globe and Mail, 9/26/2008 – Eric Duhatschek).

Training to Competition Ratios
Through a child’s growth and maturation, the athletic development model needs change through different stages. The appropriate training-to-competition ratios need to be adhered to in order to maximize a player’s time and potential. When a heavy emphasis is placed on competition at an early age, two situations occur. First, ice time is directed toward games, which reduces the amount of quality deliberate practice time. And second, the focus becomes more outcome based (winning) and less process driven (learning the game). There are all kinds of arguments put forth as to why we must allow the imbalance in our training-to-competition ratios to continue, and certainly the one-to-one ratio has its place within the recreational Hockey for Life track. However, for our Tier I, Tier II and high performance players that are part of our elite development path, the correct ratios must be adhered to at the appropriate ages.

System Alignment
The framework for long-term athlete development is influenced by many factors. We have clubs, schools and ice arena facilities all with varying interests. To maximize a player’s development needs, it is important those entities work together and become mutually supportive as each has its part to play in advancing our game. Players will best develop in a system that is clearly defined, logically structured and based upon consistent principles. We need a structure that is athlete centered and looks at the individual player’s development.

In a team sport, it is appropriate to look at the collective whole and to provide the direction and lessons that only a team sport can provide. However, we must always consider that each individual is at a different point through the stages of his or her development (early maturer or late maturer, for example). The goal is to define our sports system with a pathway that addresses the needs of each individual and maximizes their development as they progress through our system. The LTAD principles show us that at the earlier ages, both the Hockey for Life group and the ones that end up as high-performance player, should initially be held to the same pathway. Our current sport system mistakenly allows for the separation of the perceived Hockey for Life group and the perceived high-performance group before any reliable determination can possibly be made. To maximize each player’s potential, we need the major parties to re-evaluate current practices and base new practices on current legitimate research instead of commonly held beliefs in sports myths and the old “that’s the way it has always been done” attitude.
Physical, Mental, Cognitive and Emotional Development
Training should consider the mental, cognitive and emotional development of the athlete, in addition to the physical, technical and tactical (including decision making skills) components of development.

A major objective of LTAD is a holistic approach. This includes ethics, fair play and character building through the various stages. Programming should be designed to consider the athlete’s cognitive ability to address these concepts.

Continuous Improvement
Continuous improvement is a key underlying principle of long-term athlete development. This ensures that we are always evaluating our sport and are readily able to respond and implement new sports science innovations and observations. LTAD provides a continuously evolving vehicle for change for all emerging facets of physical education, sport and recreation to ensure systematic and logical delivery of programs to all ages.

Long-Term Goals for USA Hockey and the ADM
USA Hockey has a core goal to grow the game of ice hockey within the United States. We believe that the ADM will provide a pathway to excellence for those who have the ability, as well as a greater overall hockey experience for all of our players. The LTAD principles on which our model is founded address the core needs of all of our players.

Along with the National Hockey League, USA Hockey has the mutual goal of seeing more American players compete at the highest level of the game.

LTAD Stages for the American Development Model
See the individual LTAD stages of development for specifics to the American Development Model.
- Active Start
- FUNdamentals
- Learn to Train
- Train to Train
- Learn to Compete
- Train to Compete
- Train to Win
- Hockey for Life

Special acknowledgement goes to LTAD expert, Istvan Balyi and Canadian Sport For Life. The two have been the principal developers of LTAD.

LTAD Expert Group:
1. Istvan Balyi, M.A., Pacific Sport Canadian Sport Centre Vancouver
2. Charles Cardinal, M.Sc en Activité Physique, Canadian Sport Centre, Montreal
3. Colin Higgs, Ph.D., Memorial University of Newfoundland
4. Steve Norris, Ph.D., Canadian Sport Centre, Calgary
5. Richard Way, MBA, Pacific Sport Canadian Sport Centre Victoria
6. Mary Bluechardt, Ph.D., Memorial University of Newfoundland
FUNDAMENTALS

Ages 6-8 females • Ages 6-9 males

The objective of the FUNdamentals stage is to refine fundamental movement skills and begin to acquire basic sports skills. This is the time when a foundation is laid for future acquisition of more advanced skills.

General Description of the FUNdamentals Stage

- This is the stage in which children learn physical literacy, or the interrelationship between movement skills and sport skills.
- The skills that children acquire during this stage will benefit them when they engage in any activity, regardless of their level of participation.
- Bypassing the acquisition of ‘basic and specialized movement’ and ‘sport skills’ during the FUNdamentals stage is detrimental to a person’s future participation in physical activity and sport (ABCs = Agility, Balance, Coordination, Speed; gymnastics, swimming, running, gliding; throwing, striking, kicking, etc.).
- Basic sport skill development in this stage should be well structured, positive and done in a FUN and social environment.
- All programs should be structured with proper progression and monitored regularly by trained certified coaches, volunteers and parents.

USA Hockey’s Key Focus for this Stage

- Help ensure our participants gain physical literacy.
- Develop a passion for hockey in all of our children (keep kids and families in the game).
- Encourage participation in a variety of complimentary sports to help our children maximize their ability to reach their genetic potential in hockey.
- Develop on-ice balance, coordination, agility and speed.
- Introduce basic puck control skills.

Programs

USAH Hockey member clubs offer 8 & Under, and 6 & Under (Mite) programs, as well as a first year participant Learn to Play program.

Monitoring

Children have not yet begun their growth spurt. It is helpful to keep track of annual height measurements to provide a baseline for future growth.

Coach and Instructor Recommendations

Coaches must progress through the Coaching Education Program in accordance with the rules effective with the 2011-12 season, and complete the online age-specific module(s) that corresponds to the age-level of play they are coaching. Coaches need a sound knowledge of child growth and development principles for this age group and have an understanding of physical literacy through LTAD. Competency at teaching basic skills is also a key component for coaches at this stage.
LTAD Window of Opportunity
- First window for speed development at ages 6-8 for girls, ages 7-9 for boys (agility, quickness and change of direction)
- Suppleness and flexibility throughout the stage
- Movement skills throughout

Components of the Hockey FUNdamentals Stage

Physical Development
- Practice and master fundamental movement skills before sports specific skills are introduced (running, swimming, gliding/skating, gymnastics, etc.).
- Emphasize the overall development of the athlete’s physical capacities, fundamental movement skills and the ABCs of athleticism: agility, balance, coordination and speed.
- Bilateral balance must be well developed in this stage though sliding, skating and gliding sports (skating, rollerblading, two-ski water skiing, alpine and cross country skiing).
- Provide opportunities for physical activity daily (formal and informal).
- Teach appropriate and correct running, wheeling, jumping and throwing techniques using the ABCs of athleticism.
- Introduce flexibility exercises
- Emphasize motor development to produce athletes who have a better trainability for long-term development.
- Ambidextrous sports help develop refined motor skills:
  - athletics, gymnastics and swimming for the ABCs (agility, balance, coordination, speed and suppleness)
  - soccer, hockey, basketball, tennis, baseball and lacrosse for developing catching, passing, kicking and striking
  - biking, skiing and dancing for developing speed, balance and coordination
- Utilize movement in three planes of balance (linear, lateral, spatial and aerial).
- Provide initiation to physical training (warm-up and cool-down).

Focus
- Introduce basic flexibility exercises.
- Develop speed, power and endurance using activity-based games and small area hockey games (cross-ice games).
- Encourage participation in a wide range of sports.
- Develop linear, lateral and multi-directional speed with the duration of repetitions lasting less than five seconds.
- Include strength training using the child’s own body weight as well as medicine ball and Swiss ball exercises.

Psychological Development
- Develop reasoning skills through various sports and activities.
- Provide opportunities for activities that:
  - Are FUN, positive and motivating
  - Are exploratory and allow for self-discovery
  - Build confidence through a high rate of success
— Promote individual and group participation
— Maintain a “no excuses” atmosphere
— Introduce participants to simple rules and sport ethics (fair play)

• Ensure that games focus on participation.

Training and Competitive Environment
• Training/Competition Ratio: No formal competition.
• Training Volume: Play hockey two times per week, with session lengths no longer than 50 minutes in the Learn to Play program. A third session at the 8 & Under level can be held for an informal competition (cross-ice/half-ice games).
• Training Year: 4 weeks per month, 5 months per year
• Team Composition: Teams should consist of a maximum of 9 to 13 skaters. The goaltender position is rotated among team members.
• Team Structure: All players should be evaluated as:
  — Advanced = top 33%
  — Intermediate = middle 33%
  — Beginner and less skilled = bottom 33%
  Teams should be divided into three groups of equal abilities for half-ice/cross-ice competition purposes (top 1/3; middle 1/3; beginner and less skilled 1/3). Players should be grouped into teams of like abilities.
• Competition Format: All competitions are held cross-ice/half-ice, with the focus on skill development and not outcomes. At 8 & Under, the occasional jamboree can be held as a third ice touch for the week.
• Overall Activity Ratios: 25% hockey, 75% other sports and activities

8 & Under (Mites)
— 9-13 skaters per team
— No full-time goalies
— 2-3 ice touches per week
— 50-minute ice sessions
— 20 weeks per season
— 50–60 ice touches per year
— Minimum of 16 cross-ice or half-ice games and 34 practices
— Maximum 20 cross-ice or half-ice games and 40 practices

At this stage it is important to create an environment where participants want to play hockey. They need to enjoy being at the rink and learning basic skills. Play lots of fun, competitive games. Lessons must be varied, interesting and fun so participants want to come back to the rink. End each session with a game, with the goal of having everyone leave the ice with a smile on their faces. It is important to build interest in our sport and to provide self-confidence and the enjoyment of performing. Keep in mind that early specialization in a late specialization sport such as hockey will not lead to greater performance later.
Coaching Considerations

- Create a positive, fun and safe environment for the players.
- Encourage active participation by all players.
- Be clear and precise in communication and use terminology appropriate for the age.
- Limit the amount of technical or tactical information to what is appropriate for the age.
- Physical demonstration of basic sports skills must be done accurately to provide the proper imagery for players.
- Ensure that the ice surface size is in proportion to the age (cross-ice/half-ice games).
- Ensure that the players have the appropriate equipment when on the ice under your supervision.
- Have a well structured plan for each ice session.
- Provide some opportunities that guarantee success for all participants.
- Become knowledgeable with regard to the physical and mental capacities and LTAD model for the age category.
- Encourage all forms of creativity.
- Encourage parents and players to explore a wide range of other sports to assist in their long-term hockey development.
- Include planned coordination exercises within training sessions both on- and off-ice.

Equipment

Proper sizing and fit of all equipment is essential for player safety and playing effectiveness.

- Skates – must fit properly; used are fine
- Helmet and mask
- Gloves
- Wooden stick – cut at the nose when standing on skates
- Shin pads
- Elbow pads
- Undergarment layers
- Protective cup
- Hockey socks or sweat pants
- Garter belt or shorts with velcro to hold up socks
- Hockey pants
- Shoulder pads – small and light weight
- Jersey
Technical Development

Skating
- ready position
- Forward stride
- Two-foot glide
- Forward turns
- Controlled stop
- Forward crossover
- Agility, balance and coordination
  - two-feet and single-foot skating
  - high-knee run, multi-directional
  - full-body coordination; somersaults, rolls, jumps, etc.
  - upper and lower body separation; skating with shoulder rolls or exaggerated hand slides
- Forward start

Puck Control
- Lateral puck handling
- Forward-to-backward puck handling
- Diagonal puck handling
- Accelerating with the puck

Passing and Receiving
- Forehand
- Receiving – stick position, use of skates
- Eye contact

Shooting
- Wrist shot

Body Contact
- Body positioning in confrontational situations
- Angling skills
- Poke check
- Lift the stick check

Tactical Skills
- Participants should learn how to listen and follow simple instructions.
- Participants should engage in deliberate play and should learn basic decision making skills through activity games like tag and small area hockey games.
- Competition at the puck: 1-on-1 battles and loose puck races for body positioning.
- Participants should learn basic appropriate behavior within a team setting, such as how to support others and appropriate behavior in a locker room setting.
Ancillary Skills
- Hold off-ice training activities that provide several stations of purposeful games or activities.
- Encourage participation in other sport activities (e.g., gymnastics, public skating, alpine skiing, soccer, lacrosse, swimming).
- Participants, parents, and support persons should be well informed about proper equipment for practice (equipment sizing, how to dress for training, water bottles for hydration, skate sharpening, etc.). Children should be able to dress themselves by the time they move into the 10 & Under (Squirt) age category.

Life Style
- Key Concepts:
  - Fun
  - Safety
  - Social interaction
  - Creating a love of all sporting activities
  - Positive introduction to hockey
- Participate in hockey two to three times per week as long as there is participation in other sports four to six times per week to help insure future excellence.
- Because girls tend to be less active than boys, ensure that activities are gender neutral and inclusive so that active living is equally valued and promoted for all.
- Ensure that activities revolve around the school year and are enhanced by multiple sports throughout the spring, summer, and winter holidays.
- Healthy eating habits should be promoted.
- Promote adequate sleep (American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 10 hours/night).

RECOMMENDED TRAINING STRUCTURE
TRAINING STRUCTURE FOR TEACHING THE 3 S’S

There are three broad areas of training in a hockey player’s development. One of the constant challenges facing you, the coach, is how to get the most out of your players with the precious, and often limited, ice time you have for training. The following training structure will give you some recommended guidelines related to these three areas of training.

SKILLS – Hockey Skills & Habits Training
This begins as basic fundamental skills and progresses to include a more complex combination of skills as the players get older or more proficient. Habits include things like facing the puck, stopping at the net, etc.
- Skating
- Puck control
- Shooting
- Passing
- Body contact
SENSE – Hockey Concepts and Awareness Training
Offensive and defensive awareness with and without the puck is key. This includes the ability to read the level of pressure by an opponent and make correct decisions according to the play (read and react). Concepts involve development of all of the key hockey concepts that are used by all players. This would include but is not limited to:

- Moving to open space
- Offensive- and defensive-side body position
- Offensive support and defensive support
- Puck pressure and containment

Small area games with a distinct purpose are the best way to develop these mental skills in our game.

SYSTEMS – Team Play Training
Development in this area provides for positional play within the team’s designated structure. This would include but is not limited to forechecking patterns and defensive zone coverage structure.
PRACTICE PROGRESSION - ICE UTILIZATION

The ice utilization shows some of the recommended methods for dividing the ice into stations. Station work will help your players get more puck touches and the necessary repetitions to continually develop and refine basic skills. Ice time is your most valuable resource as a coach and skill-based practices featuring small area games and a variety of stations will help you run efficient practices with a high energy level.
NOTEPAD: