HOCKEY CANADA

CANADIAN PLAYER PATHWAY

U7 (Initiation)
Player Pathway Policy

2020-2021 Season

(Feb. 23, 2020)

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Section 1: Introduction to U7 Hockey

"DEVELOPING SKILLS FIRST"

The Hockey Canada U7 Pathway is an essential component in developing the hockey skills of all young kids playing hockey in Canada. The Hockey Canada U7 Skill Development resource is the official hockey instructional curriculum of Hockey Canada.

Introduction

How a player gets their initial taste of hockey is crucial. The first few years of hockey must be a positive experience full of fun and excitement.

If the beginner has fun, develops basic skills and builds confidence, there is a better chance they will go on to enjoy hockey for a lifetime. But if a young player has an unhappy, unrewarding experience, they may quit at an early age and never discover the real joy of Canada's game. Every young player should have the opportunity to enjoy hockey for life!

The goal of Hockey Canada is to see the day when every youngster across Canada getting started in hockey will have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from a program designed to meet their specific needs. One that ensures progressive skill development through well-delivered practice sessions and age-appropriate game play in an environment well-suited to their skill level.

A minor hockey association's programming at the U7 level will serve as the foundation upon which the entire minor hockey association is built. Players at every level in minor hockey benefit from getting the 'right start' in the game. Programming at the U7 level is a crucial piece in building the skills of house league and rep team players alike.

More than 30 years ago, Hockey Canada developed the Initiation (now U7) Program to ensure a fun, safe and positive hockey experience. It served as a structured, learn-to-play program designed to introduce beginners the basic skills. It also enabled young players to build a solid skill base and become contributing members of a team effort, develop self-confidence and experience a sense of personal achievement – goals achieved in an atmosphere of fun and fair play. In 1995, Hockey Canada passed a motion requiring the program to be implemented by every minor hockey association across the country and to change their constitution/bylaws to reflect the creation of a new division in hockey.

"Learning the basic skills at a young age will set the foundation for everything a player will accomplish in the game of hockey."
Corey McNabb, Director of Hockey Development Programs, Hockey Canada

About the U7 Player Pathway

Programming should be delivered through a progressive learn-to-play teaching curriculum that spans the five- and six-year-old age group. Children learn best through participating in practice drills and sessions as well as informal and modified games such as shinny, freeze tag and obstacle courses.

The program consists of four levels of instruction, designed specifically for young hockey players. Each level consists of a series of practice plans (lesson plans) that follow a defined path of progressions.

The skills of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are introduced and refined in a progressive one-step-at-a-time manner.

Although the emphasis is on having fun and skill development, hockey at these ages should also allow youngsters to experience fitness, fair play and cooperation.

To ensure a positive experience for the children, a coaching clinic has been designed for the on-ice coaches that focuses on communication, teaching skills, leadership, skill analysis, lesson organization, and safety and risk management.

Program Philosophy

- Hockey Canada developed the program to ensure that the child's early experiences with hockey are delivered in a safe and positive experience.
- The program enables participants to become contributing members of a team effort, develop self-confidence and experience a sense of personal achievement.

Program Goals

- To have fun while playing hockey and engaging in physical activity.
- To learn the fundamental skills required to play the game of hockey.
- To develop and refine basic motor patterns.
- To be introduced to the concepts of cooperation and fair play.

Conclusion

Hockey Canada plays an important role in ensuring minor hockey associations have the necessary resources, tools and supports for young players from 5-6 years old. Hockey Canada believes developing the fundamental skills and attitudes to play the game and recognizes this will foster an enjoyment of hockey as a lifetime participation sport.

U7 programming is intended to focus on children ages five and six years old and is age-appropriate for all young hockey players. Annually, the number of kids between the ages of five and six registered with Hockey Canada is 75,000; these 75,000 players make up approximately 15% of all registered minor players in the grassroots Hockey Canada system.

Hockey Canada has approximately 2,500 minor hockey associations that receive education, training and resources outlining the benefits of participating in all levels of minor hockey programming, and these associations are encouraged to deliver age-appropriate programming to their membership. Approximately 8,000 coaches and instructors volunteer each season to teach and lead programming at the U7 level of hockey.

This resource guide outlines the significant benefits of delivering age-appropriate programming across Canada. The future of minor hockey in Canada lies within the quality hockey development programs offered to young players.

"Scaling down is important, and the research shows that when children are more actively engaged, they touch the puck more often, have the puck on their stick longer and are interacting with one another to a greater extent."
Dr. Stephen Norris, Consultant to Hockey Canada

Section 2:
U7 Policy and Recommendations

Hockey Canada Policy for U7 Hockey

Playing Surface – Cross-Ice

- The maximum size of the ice surface is 100 feet by 60 feet (100x60).
- U7 games will be played cross-ice for the entire season.

Cross-Ice Game Play Rules

- Hockey Canada Playing Rules are followed except as stated below.
- 4-on-4 (plus a goaltender) – A player may play goal, but full goaltender equipment is not required.
- Game format: two periods with a run-time clock.
- Game length: not to exceed 60 minutes.
- Timed buzzer or whistle for line changes:
    - Game does not stop; players change on the fly at buzzer/whistle.
        - If there are fewer than four players on the bench, the active player designated to stay out for the following shift must return to the bench prior to continuing play.
        - On the buzzer/whistle, players must relinquish control of the puck immediately and vacate the ice. The new players enter the ice immediately.
        - Failure to immediately relinquish control of the puck or new players entering the ice surface prematurely may result in a penalty (see below). When play is stopped due to the goaltender freezing the puck or a goal being scored, the official will signal the attacking players to back off three metres. Once the attackers have moved back, the players may resume play as soon as the possession team has control of the puck. In the event a puck goes out of play, the official will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and the offending team will be required to provide a three-metre cushion.
- Shift length not to exceed two minutes.
- Face-offs to start each half.
- Change of possession:
    - Continuous play; when whistles lead to a change in puck possession, the official (coach) will signal the attacking players to back off three metres. Once the attackers have moved back, play may resume as soon as the possession team has control of the puck.
    - Goaltender freezes the puck – the official (coach) blows the whistle to indicate the attacking team backs off and the defending team gets possession.
    - Puck shot out of play – the offending team backs off and the official (coach) gives the non-offending team a new puck.
- One official per game – coaches may also act as official for games (RECOMMENDATION)
- Goaltenders do not need full equipment. (RECOMMENDATION)
- No score is kept.
- No standings or stats kept.
- Blue puck (4 oz) (RECOMMENDATION)
- Net size – 2x3, 3x4 or 4x6. (ALL ARE ACCEPTABLE)

- Penalties:
    - Player sits next shift, game is played 4-on-4 and if offending team controls the puck after the infraction, official blows the whistle and calls for change of possession.
    - Minor penalties are noted, with the official (coach) briefly raising their arm to indicate a penalty will be assessed. At the conclusion of the shift, the official (coach) notifies the coach of the infraction and the number of the offending player.
    - If the offending team controls the puck after the infraction, the official (coach) blows the whistle and calls for a change of possession; the non-offending team is given room to play the puck (three-metre cushion).
    - The offending player will sit out the next shift, but the team will play even strength.
    - Should an infraction occur that would normally require a player to be ejected from the game (game misconduct, match penalty or gross misconduct), the player will be removed for the remainder of that game. Even under these circumstances, teams will not play shorthanded and no game incident report will be required.

Player Evaluations, Selections, Tryouts

- No player evaluations, selections or tryouts prior to or during the first week of school. (REQUIREMENT)
    - No player evaluations, selections or tryouts during the off-season phase (previous season, including March through August).
    - No player evaluations, selections, or tryouts during the first week of school where school starts the week after Labour Day.
    - Where school starts prior to Labour Day, there must be four skates and/or practices starting the week following Labour Day before player evaluations, selections, tryouts commence.
- Must offer a minimum of four practices and/or skill sessions prior to formal player evaluations, selections, tryouts starting. (REQUIREMENT)
- Must have a minimum of three formal player evaluations, selections, tryouts sessions. (REQUIREMENT)
    - One skills session, one small-area games session, one formal game. (RECOMMENDATION)

Development Phase

- Must be a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season. (REQUIREMENT)

Fair and Equal Ice Time

- Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players to contribute. Shortening of the bench in an attempt to win games is not permitted. All players and goaltenders should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time. (REQUIREMENT)
- Positional rotation:
    - All players play all positions – forward/defence/goaltender. (RECOMMENDATION)
    - All players get a chance to start the game and start the second half. (RECOMMENDATION)

- Goaltender rotation:
  - No full-time goaltenders. (REQUIREMENT)
  - All players get a chance to play goal. (RECOMMENDATION)
  - Players can play goal during practices and games with no goaltending equipment required.

Playoffs

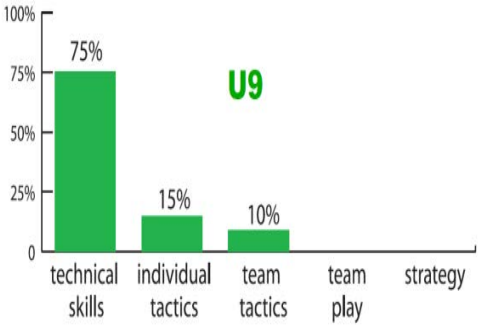
- There are no playoffs in U7 hockey. (REQUIREMENT)

Seasonal Structure

- Preparation phase
  - See Player Evaluations, selections, tryouts above.
- Development phase
  - Teams must have a period of development time following player evaluations, selections, tryouts prior to the start of the regular season.
- Development and regular season phase
  - Recommended maximum of 25 games per year (including exhibition, league, tournaments and jamborees).
  - Recommended seasonal breaks:
    - Season should allow for two seasonal breaks (not including Christmas/long weekends).
    - Seasonal break would be a minimum five days without a scheduled game or mandatory practice.
- Tournaments are jamboree format
  - A jamboree is designed to engage players in a fun environment; it is the coming together of several players who are then placed onto teams. Games may or may not be competitive and the emphasis is on fun and fair play.
  - A festival is designed to engage players in a fun environment: it is the coming together of teams to participate in games and fun activities. Games may be competitive, but no standings are kept.
- Off-season phase
  - Recommend limited skills-based on-ice training, making more time for multisport activity

Position-Specific Training

- Small-area games in practice / station-based practices / skill-focused drills
- Only 15% of practice time should be spent on tactics with 85% of practice time spent on skills.



Section 3:
Rationale for U7 Programming

Benefits of Cross-Ice Hockey

At times, there can be concerns from parents about how small-area games may impact their child's hockey development, but we ask parents to trust the development experts. It is also important to remind parents that putting young players into a competitive environment too early will compromise their development. Children need to be placed into competitive situations that suit their age-appropriate abilities and parents need to be realistic about what children should be able to do all age levels. This is why Hockey Canada's long-term player development strategy is so important.

It is important to fully understand and appreciate the benefits of cross-ice hockey. The configuration of dividing the playing surface into cross-ice is a decision that has been made in consultation with experts in athlete development.

An overview of very simple statistics illustrates a number of advantages to the smaller-surface games model:

- Increases the emphasis on skating skills, including elements like agility, balance, coordination and quickness.
- Number of puck battles increases.
- Puck control and puck protection skills are enhanced, which will help players succeed at higher levels.
- Fundamentals of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are reinforced at a greater rate.
- Increase in incidental body contact requires players to play with their head up, preparing players for proper use of body contact and checking skills in the future.
- Less time and space increase the frequency of making hockey decisions.
- Better environment for teaching ice awareness and boosts hockey sense.
- Over time, the intensity level of competition increases with the progressive skill development of players.

"You have to be able to make plays in pretty small areas.
The more you practice in small spaces the better off you are."
Sidney Crosby, Canada's National Men's Team

"You need to be able to make quick passes and have quick
communication. Small area games are important."
Brianne Jenner, Canada's National Women's Team

Long-Term Player Development Model

Research has proven that putting young players into a competitive environment too early will compromise their development. Children should only be placed into competitive situations that suit their skill level and abilities.

It is important to fully understand and appreciate the benefits of cross-ice and half-ice hockey and why Hockey Canada has a national policy ensuring all U9 hockey is played in smaller, modified spaces.

An illustration of very simple statistics shows the advantages to the smaller-surface games model.

Small spaces equate to more engagement in the play.

All players are close to the play and have much more opportunity for puck touches. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, their opportunities to be engaged in the play are doubled when the playing area is smaller.

A very large difference between full-ice and small areas.

There are six times as many shots at goal in a cross-ice or half-ice game, because players are closer to the puck at all times and the puck finds its way to the net much more often.

Shrinking the playing surface increases offence.

Players are much closer to the net, skate shorter distance from goal to goal and have increased opportunities for offensive play.

More of a team game is apparent.

Players are observed passing and attempting to pass the puck more often. This is for two reasons:

1. All players are close enough to pressure the puck more frequently.
2. Teammates are in close support of the puck carrier at all times.

Short, quick passes find their mark.

In smaller spaces, more passes are attempted and most of these passes are five to 10 feet in length. When passes are shorter, accuracy improves, and players have more success receiving the pass. Players also start to understand the importance of team puck possession.

U7 Player Pathway – Rationale

Dr. Stephen Norris has consulted with Hockey Canada in the areas of player development and performance programming for a number of years. Dr. Norris has also played a key role as a consultant to the 'Own the Podium' high performance/technical groups leading up to a number of Olympic Winter Games. He was one of the five founding members and contributors to the 'Canadian Sport for Life' movement focusing on athlete/participant development and supported Hockey Canada in the design of the Hockey Canada Long-Term Player Development Model and Canadian Player Pathways.

In each area of the policy's requirements outlined below, rationale has been provided and has been supplemented by Dr. Norris in the shaded areas.

Player evaluations, selections, tryoutss cannot be scheduled prior to the start of the school year. (REQUIREMENT)

- Give minor hockey associations and parents back the summer – the season does not need to start this early only to be finished at the end of January or early in February (start later and end later).
- Give minor hockey associations a chance to get organized and begin planning.
- The start of school year can be very stressful for young players, and they do not need to add hockey tryouts starting at the same time as the school year.

There are very serious considerations that need to be addressed here. First, the notion of tryouts taking place weeks, if not months in advance of the actual season for this age group makes very little sense due to the realities of child development during these periods.

The summer months are a time where youngsters not only consolidate previous experiences, but also advance their competency due to aspects such as recovery from earlier specificity, demonstrate adaptation of all previous experiences to new situations and activities over the summer months, and reveal growth and development opportunities that occur naturally – physical, psychological, cognitive, motor development, social, etc.

Second, everyone should understand that the return-to-school period (both the couple of weeks before, the week of and the 'wash-in period' until the student is settled back into the routine) is an extremely stressful period in terms of the biological impact upon the student.

Must offer a minimum of four practices and/or skill sessions prior to formal tryouts starting. (REQUIREMENT)

- A player's first experience in the new hockey season should not be a formal tryout – this gives all players the opportunity to get back on the ice in a more 'player-friendly' scenario.
- Help level the playing field; not all players have a chance to go to hockey schools or prep camps prior to the start of the season.
- Provide minor hockey associations the opportunity to run their own prep camp instead of members spending money outside the association.

There is a great benefit for children to be offered the opportunity to participate in four ice sessions prior to formal selection or evaluation. Players feel both more relaxed and are able to perform at a better skill level following four ice sessions, rather than the alternative of being evaluated in their first time back on the ice. By providing these opportunities, players are now in situation where stress has been mitigated and they are able to showcase their ability on the ice.

Player evaluations, selections, tryoutss must be minimum of three formal tryout sessions. Recommendation is one skills session, one small-area games session and one formal game. (REQUIREMENT)

- Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standardized process will show transparency, fairness and consistency.
- Provide coaches with the foundation for a development plan based on a solid and quantifiable evaluation.

This follows the previous point of providing ALL young players with the opportunity to re-engage with the hockey. For example, it would be unacceptable for a school in the first week of September to give children an exam that they must pass, or else the child would not be permitted to take that subject during the school year. This would be unacceptable to parents, yet this is the impact of tryouts early in the process before anything is taught.

Must have a period of development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season. (REQUIREMENT)

- It is very important to provide coaches with the opportunity to develop and improve their players' skills prior to getting into organized games.
- The progression should be skills before tactics and tactics before systems.
- This will eliminate or reduce pressure and or focus on winning.

As outlined above, professional and/or knowledgeable individuals wishing to provide positive developmental experiences for children or youth would reinforce the need for an instructional or practice component prior to the start of the season. With the implementation of this policy, we are moving forward to not only accept, but welcome development opportunities for the betterment of players.

Section 4:
U7 Seasonal Structure

Seasonal Structure

The Member must have a clearly identified seasonal structure as per the definition of an ideal hockey season. The ideal hockey season is a guideline and is subject to a range of minor differences regarding suggested numbers based on Member differences.

The U7 seasonal structure can take on many forms. This section identifies a set of minimum standards that Hockey Canada membership must adhere to. Keep in mind, there is some flexibility because the framework below (see Figures 1) provides a set of recommended timeframes when minor hockey associations build their seasonal plan. If the season starts in October or even as late as November, the minor hockey association should still follow the guidelines of a balanced season approach. Some of the dates and timeframes are guidelines while others are fixed. The number of games and practices are also recommendations based on what Hockey Canada has set out in the Long-Term Player Development Model and U7 Player Pathway.

The annual calendar is divided into five phases to enhance the player engagement process and ensure each phase of development has a very specific focus. It is important to abide by these phases and not compromise the developmental process by accelerating the calendar and attempting to have players engaged in activities like competitive games and tournament play before the proposed schedule.

1. Preparation Phase (Player Evaluations, selections, tryoutss)

- This refers to the period of time prior to the season starting.
    - See Player Evaluations, selections, tryoutss on Page 8 for more information.

2. Development Phase – Up to 12 weeks

- This refers to the period of time following tryouts prior to the regular season starting.

3. Development & Regular Season – Up to 14 weeks

- This refers to the period of time from the first regular-season game to the start of playoffs.

4. Playoff Phase – Up to 4 weeks

- This refers to the period of time from the end of the regular season to the end of playoffs.

5. Off-season Phase

- This refers to the period of time from the end of the playoffs to the start of the next Preparation Phase.

The Ideal Season

The U7 Player Pathway will give young players an excellent opportunity to continue positive development while having excellent experiences in the game. The ideal season addresses issues like ensuring the season does not conflict with the start of the school year, what the tryout process must look like for young players and how the season will be structured to maximize development opportunities for all players in the system.

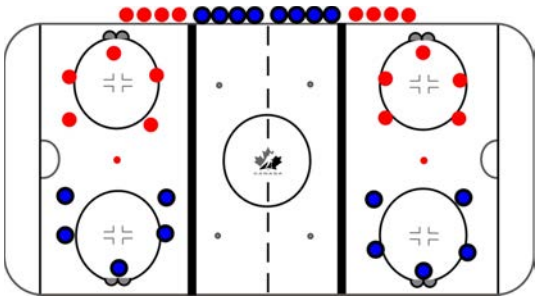
Monthly Goals

The U7 Player Pathway and corresponding coaching materials provide for a progressive and incremental application to skill development that is appropriate for the U7 player. Referring to the Hockey Canada Skills Manual for U7 hockey will provide coaches with the necessary framework for practice sessions that meet their players needs. The monthly seasonal goals should correspond with the chart that outlines the skills players should be exposed to throughout the season.

Preparation and/or Evaluation Phase

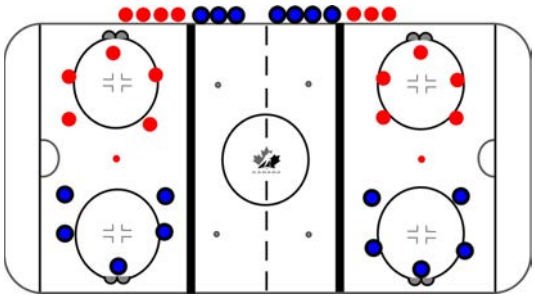
The preparation/evaluation phase is to ensure players are grouped with like-ability players. At the U9 level there should be no tryouts where players are cut, but rather evaluations to ensure players participate with like-ability players for their maximum growth. Tiering is a term used for grouping of players. A major component to tiering comes down to team composition. All teams are going to look a little different as the needs of the associations and communities are varied. The examples below are based on a team of 18 players, which is recommended by Hockey Canada as the ideal number for a roster.

Given every association is different, getting to 18 players per team may be difficult, especially for smaller associations. However, consider why 18 is the ideal. That allows for four lines (4-on-4 hockey) and two goaltenders. In most situations, that means a player is on the ice every other shift and that is where the focus should be – keeping kids on the ice as much as possible. *If your MHA has a great discrepancy based on the suggestions below, you are encouraged to contact your Member for further support in rostering teams.*



TIERING WITHIN A TEAM

The 18 players on these two teams have been divided into skill-based lines, with like-skill players from each team playing against the other. These teams can be from the same or different associations.



TIERING WITHIN AN ASSOCIATION

This association split its 34 house league players into four teams. There are two teams of nine and two of eight, all participating in cross-ice games. The teams are balanced, but the lines are divided by skill (see above for explanation). All four teams play at the same time every week.

Development Phase

During the development phase, coaches should be focused on skill development. The ideal practice-to-game ratio has been identified as 3:1, or three practice sessions to one game played. The start of the season for U7 players is not a fixed time. Therefore, the guidelines outlined in the U7 seasonal structure are just that – guidelines.

The goal for every minor hockey association should be to set aside a window of time where young players have more practices than games. The Hockey Canada U7 Skills Manual provides coaches with a series of well-crafted practice plans (ice sessions) that focus on developing fundamental movement skills like striding, turning and stopping, manipulation skills like shooting, passing, puck control and the very important motor skills of agility, balance, coordination. All of these components should be a part of player-centred skill development in a fun and safe environment that promotes self-confidence.

Regular Season Phase

The regular season phase represents the bulk of the season in the U7 seasonal structure. The practice-to-game ratio shifts to 2:1 or two practices for every game played.

It is important that coaches continue to focus on skill development during practice sessions. Once again, the Hockey Canada U7 Skills Manual provides a wide variety of resources in the form of practice sessions as well as drills that will assist in the delivery of practices that will meet the skills development needs of young players. Hockey Canada has developed additional resources to support coaches in their efforts to deliver practice plans. The Hockey Canada Network (U7 Program materials are Free), Drill Hub and the U7 Program all contain age-appropriate and skill-specific resources to meet the needs of young U7 hockey players.

Even though the regular season phase has a lower practice-to-game ratio (2:1) through the months of November, December and January, there are still up to 24 possible practice sessions to support and encourage young players through this skill-acquisition phase of the season.

Game Play Phase

The game play phase has a practice-to-game ratio of 1:1, or one practice to one game played. It is important to ensure practice sessions continue through the game play phase. This will provide coaches with the opportunity to continue to reinforce individual skill development elements in practices.

SEASONAL STRUCTURE

U7			
WEEKS	Up to 12 Weeks - prior to the start of the Regular Season phase	Up to 14 weeks - after the completion of the Development Phase	Up to 4 Weeks at the conclusion of the Regular Season Phase
PHASE	Prep / Evaluation Phase & Development Phase	Regular Season Phase	Game Play Phase
ICE SET-UP	Cross Ice games	Cross Ice games	Cross Ice Games
BALANCE	40% of the season	45% of the season	15% of the season
VOLUME up to 30 weeks	Up to 12 Weeks	Up to 14 Weeks	Up to 4 Weeks
up to 35-45 practices	20 Practice Sessions	20 Practice Sessions	5 Practice Sessions
up to 15-25 games	3 Games	Up to 10 Games	Up to 12 Games
up to 3 jamboree/festivals	1 Jamboree	1 Jamboree	1 Jamboree

Figure 1: U7 Seasonal Structure – Full Season of Cross-Ice Play

Preparation/Evaluation Phase included in the Development Phase timelines

Ice Surface Set-up

The game play format used in U7 cross-ice hockey is referred to as the Two-Team Game Play Model (see Figure 4.2). This model is built on two teams playing one another in the two end-zones. Each U7 team is divided into two units. A player may play goal but is not required to wear full goaltender equipment.

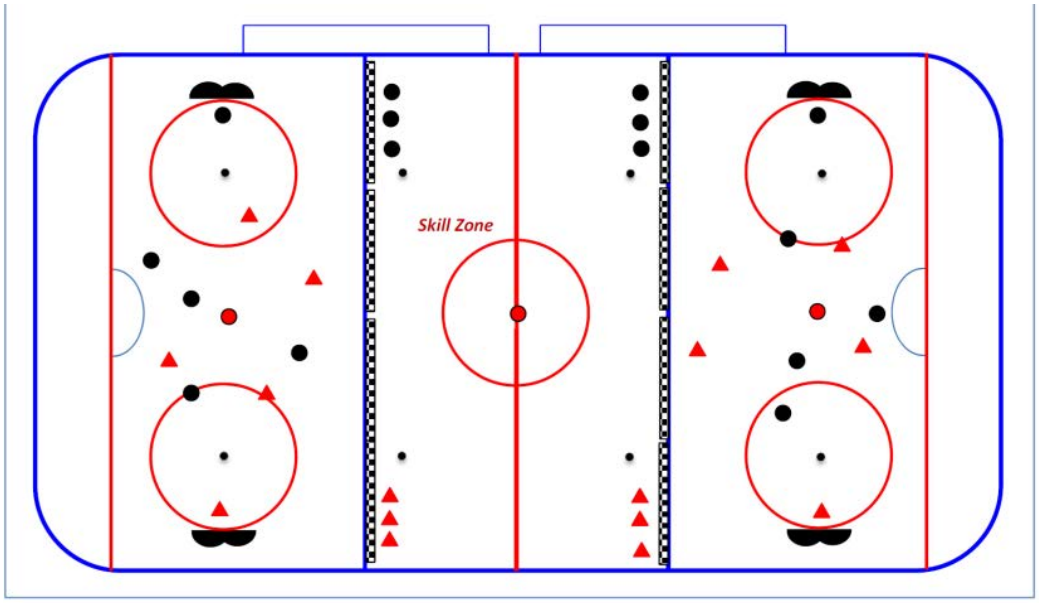


Figure 4.2: Two Teams – Two Cross-Ice Games Model with Skill Zone

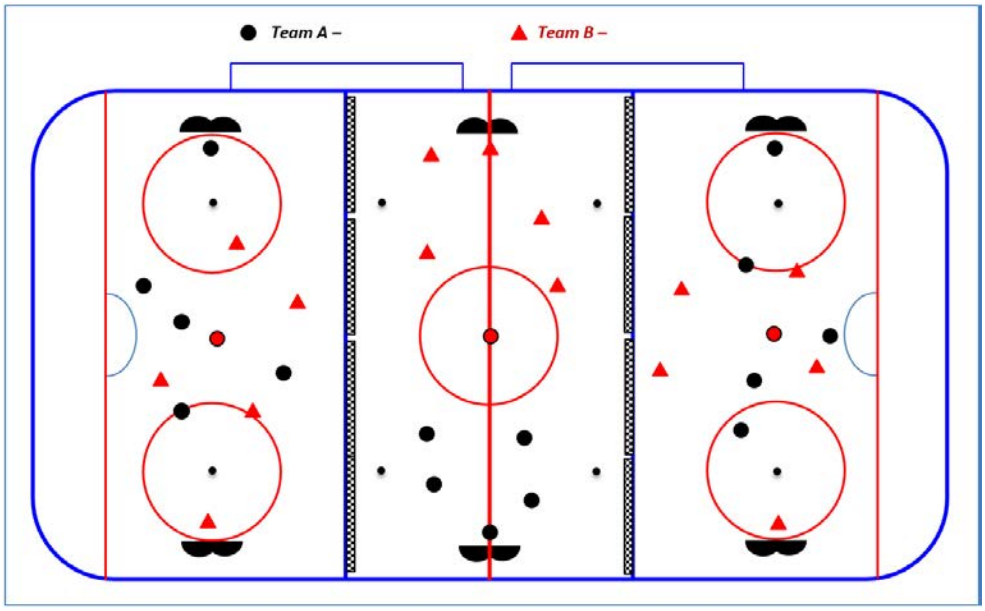


Figure 4.3: Three Teams – Three Cross-Ice Games Model

In some minor hockey communities, team composition may be smaller. If this is the case, the ice is still divided but only one end will be used for game play. The other portion of the ice can be used as a practice surface (see Figure 4.4).

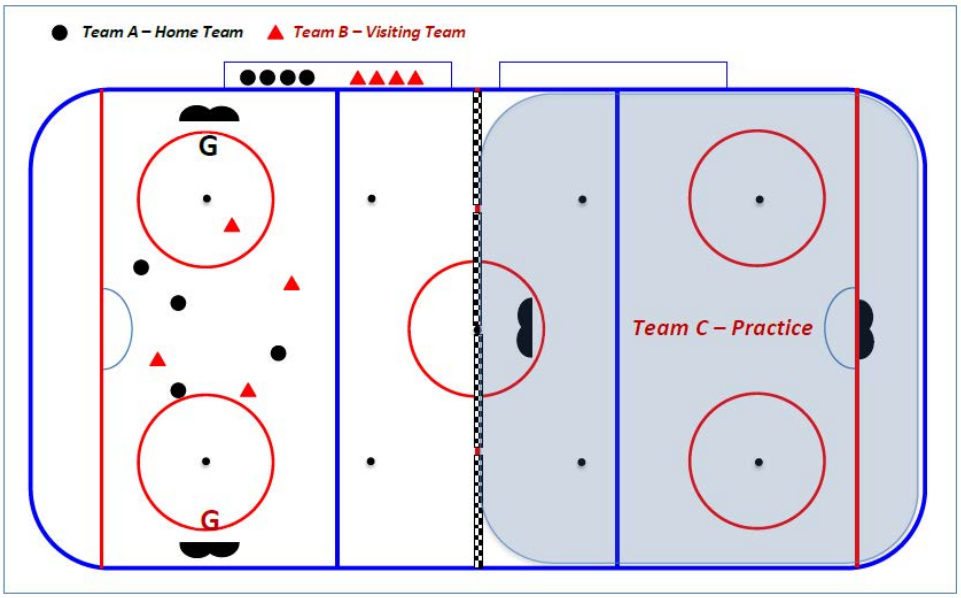


Figure 4.4: Three Teams – One Cross-Ice Game and one Practice

Game Setup and Flow

Two team – two game model (RECOMMENDATION)

- In this model, each team will consist of up to 18 players (16 skaters and two goaltenders) divided into two units of nine players. Each team unit will have one goaltender and eight skaters. Smaller numbers will allow for players to double shift to ensure there are always four players on the ice. Coaches must make sure all players take turns double shifting.
- The length of a game is not to go beyond 60 minutes – two halves plus a three-minute warm-up.
- It is recommended that in each half, the centre spot should be marked to indicate where the face-off will take place. This is to be established at the midpoint between both nets.
- When play is stopped due to the goaltender freezing the puck or a goal being scored, the referee will signal the attacking players to back off three metres. Once the attackers have moved back, the players may resume play as soon as the possession team has control of the puck. In the event a puck goes out of play, the referee will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and the offending team will be required to provide a three-metre cushion.
- Incidental contact may happen, but body-checking is not permitted.
- There is no centre-ice (red) line, and therefore no icing.
- There are no blue-lines in play, therefore there are no offsides.
- Teams will share the player benches or utilize the neutral zone for players not in play.
- The main score clock can be used to keep time for both games simultaneously.
- No score is kept, and no game sheets are necessary.

Section 5: U7 Coach Requirements and Resources

Instructors & Coaches

All head coaches of U7 teams require:

1) Hockey University – Online Community Coach training
2) Coach 1 – Intro to Coach training. (See Section 7 for additional Member-specific coaching policies)
3) Respect in Sport – Activity Leader

Overview

The NCCP Coach 1 – Intro to Coach clinic supports U9 coaches across Canada and provides coaches with the proper content for working with children at this level, as well as providing instruction in the delivery of the program itself.

The Community Coach Stream clinic is part of the new NCCP Coaching Program and is available through Hockey Canada's online Hockey University.

Recognizing the necessity to provide a positive experience for young hockey players, the U7 program builds upon a number of values that provide quality experiences, including:

- Providing a safe environment in which to be introduced to fundamental skills.
- Developing an understanding of basic teamwork through participation in structured activities and adapted game-like situations.
- Introducing participants to the concepts of fair and cooperative play.
- Refining basic motor patterns and building self-confidence.
- Providing an environment that challenges individuals positively and rewards the participants for their efforts.
- Providing opportunities to experience a number of related activities in the building of a lifestyle of fitness and activity.

Certification and/or Training

Pathway for certification is shown in the graphic above.

NOTE: Hockey Canada, the Coaching Association of Canada and Members do not require CERTIFIED status in this stream, only TRAINED.

Professional Development – NCCP Instructional Clinics

Hockey Canada has created a series of instructional clinics in addition to the Coach Stream program. While the coaching clinic is more specific to supporting coaches in the team environment, the instructional clinics are specific to teaching skills in all areas of the game.

Members offer these clinics as a way of supporting/enhancing the ongoing development of coaches in the following areas:

- skating (U7 and U9)
- skills (U7 and U9)

Resources

The following resources are available to support minor hockey associations and coaches in the design and delivery of programming that meets the needs of young players between the ages of seven and eight years old. A wide variety of materials are available for download HERE.

Administrator's Guide

The purpose of the Administrator's Guide is to introduce local organizers with the half-ice program and show how to put the program to good use in the minor hockey association.

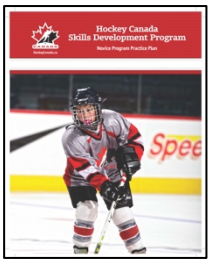
This guide includes an overview of Hockey Canada rules for half-ice hockey, model programs, information on setting up the U7 program, supporting parent information presentations, the importance of instructor training and an outline of the programming resources to support proper hockey instructional methodology.

Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual was designed to give coaches all of the necessary information needed to teach hockey skills to players five and six years old.

Some of the areas discussed are leadership, communication, teaching skills and lesson organization. Each of these components contains valuable information when it comes time to implement each of the ice-session plans from the Hockey Canada Skills Manuals.

Ice-Session Plans (Lesson Plans)



The U7 Program Practice Plan Manual is a compilation of ideas from top hockey people across Canada. These plans are available through the Hockey Canada Network or the Hockey Canada Skill Development Program Manual series. These plans map out easy-to-follow ice sessions. U7 hockey players need to progress throughout these ice sessions to ensure they are exposed to age-appropriate drills and activities that will develop their confidence. The goal is to support the development of a sound skill base so young players will experience success playing the game.

The plans are designed to serve as a model for on-ice delivery. Minor hockey associations are not required to follow each ice session exactly as planned, but the development of these resources considers the needs of young players who are new to hockey and on the road to building a sound set of hockey skills. Each minor hockey association should encourage their coaches to use these ice session plans so players will be guided through a skill-development program that has been specifically designed for U7 players.

The **Hockey Canada Network** is an iOS and Android app that contains a wealth of information for coaches and instructors. The entire series of Hockey Canada Skills Manuals and the Skills of Gold DVD series are available on the Hockey Canada Network. This includes the entire series of lesson plans designed specifically for the U7 program. All lesson plans are available to coaches and instructors at no cost. While there is a fee to access all the resources in the **Hockey Canada Network**, downloading the free version of the app will permit the user to create an account and log in to access all the resources that support the U9 level of programming.

The **Hockey Canada Drill Hub** is located at HockeyCanada.ca. This coach resource tool also provides coaches of U7 players with access to all of the program ice-session plans for free. Coaches can sign up to have free access to Hockey Canada's growing library of drills to create practice plans with a set of drills or use suggested practice plans, which are easy to print or view on most devices. Minor hockey associations must encourage coaches to access both resource platforms to ensure they have up-to-date resources to support the program implementation.

U7 Skills Matrix

The Long-Term Player Development Model places U7 hockey at the 'Fundamentals 2' stage and is a time when programming is focused on fundamental skill development. With this in mind, the U7 skills matrix provides an overview of the skills that players in this age group must have opportunities to develop through progressive and meaningful practice sessions.

The Hockey Canada U7 Skills Manual contains a series of 32 practice sessions that provide the appropriate skill instruction cues and drills designed to support players in their efforts to acquire these skills. For more information on the Hockey Canada U7 Skills Manual, refer to the resource section below.

U7 SKILLS

LTPD STAGE –Fundamentals

Balance and Agility	Edge Control	Starting and Stopping	Forward Skating and Striding	Backward Skating	Turning and Crossovers
• Basic stance • Getting up from the ice • Balance on one foot • Jumping on 2 feet / 1 foot • Gliding on two skates • Gliding on one skate – fwd and bwd • Lateral Crossovers – step and plant / continuous	• Inside edge glide • Figure 8's – forward – inside & outside edge • Figure 8's – backward – inside & outside edge • Slalom	• T-start • Front v-start • Crossover start • Backward c-cut start • One o'clock – eleven o'clock • Outside leg stop • Two-foot parallel stop • One-leg bwd stop • Two-leg bwd stop	• C-cuts – left foot / right foot / • C-cuts alternating • T-push • Forward striding	• C-cuts – left foot / right foot / • C-cuts alternating • Gliding on two skates – backward • Gliding on one skate – backward	• Glide turns • Tight turns • C-cuts – around circle – outside foot – forward & backward • Crossovers – forward & backward • Backward on-foot stop and t-start • Pivots – bwd to fwd & fwd to bwd • Pivots – open & reverse

Stationary Puck Control	Moving Puck Control	Stationary Passing and Receiving	Moving Passing and Receiving	Shooting	
• Stance • Narrow • Wide • Side – front – side • Toe drag – front & side	• Narrow • Wide • Open ice carry – forehand & backhand • Weaving with puck • Toe drag – front & side	• Stationary forehand pass • Stationary backhand pass • Stationary bank pass	• Moving forehand pass • Moving backhand pass	• Forehand - sweep shot • Forehand - wrist shot • Backhand - sweep shot • Forehand - flip shot	

Individual Offensive Tactics	Individual Defensive Tactics				
• Body fakes • Stick fakes	• Angling				

The Hockey Canada Skills Manuals are part of the skills development series – the official instructional curriculum of Hockey Canada. All coaches and on-ice volunteers are encouraged to utilize these resources to assist in enhancing skill development in all programs and levels of play.

The Hockey Canada skills development coaching manuals are meant to be a guide for the coach, allowing them the flexibility to make adjustments, if necessary, to meet the demands of their players and team. Eventually, from the direction provided in the manuals, coaches will gain the confidence and creativity to begin designing their own lesson plans.

Section 6: Frequently Asked Questions

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the core requirements of the U7 Game Play Model?
The U7 Game Play Model was designed to maximize the opportunity to engage all players in the game. The core elements for this model are using running time, continuous play on shift changes, no offside, no icing, no face-offs after goals and penalties are called.

2. How will player development be affected if there is no offside or icing called during game play?
The U7 Game Play Model is a 4-on-4 model (plus goaltenders) on cross-ice. Learning offside and icing will come in time, but the primary focus on age-appropriate training and programming needs to be on skill development in the areas of skating, puck control, passing, receiving and shooting. Concepts like offside, icing, positional play and face-offs can be introduced at a later age when players move to the full-ice game-play model in the transition to Atom hockey.

3. Are U7 teams permitted to identify a full-time goaltender?
The U7 Program has no full-time goaltenders. In the U7 Game Play Model, all players have an opportunity to play goal without the requirement of goalie equipment. All players should rotate through the goaltender position throughout the season. The Hockey Canada Long-Term Player Development Model encourages a wide range of skill development at a young age, and focusing on a single position may limit the opportunity to practice skills in all areas.

4. Are U7 cross-ice games required to be two 25-minute halves?
This is only a recommended timeframe for the game. The game time established for the U7 Game Play Model is based on a 60-minute ice session. Ice sessions can be shorter or longer. If this is the case, adjust the ice session accordingly ensuring there is time for a short warm-up, two halves of play and a short break between the two halves to make any adjustments that need to take place with the game not exceeding 60 minutes.

5. Is the length of a shift in the U7 Game Play Model limited to 60 seconds?
The shift length of 60 seconds is a recommendation. Shifts may be up to a maximum of two minutes in length. This is at the discretion of the Member. However, it is important to reference the core requirements of the game to ensure the spirit of the game is maintained.

6. Are U7 teams permitted to play full-ice games?
No, the focus is on size-appropriate field of play for the age of the participant, and for five- and six-year-old players that is cross-ice.

7. What is the difference between a jamboree and a tournament?
A jamboree is designed to engage players in a fun environment and is the coming together of several players who are then placed onto teams. Games may or may not be competitive and the emphasis is on fun and fair play. A tournament is defined as a schedule of games played among three or more teams, which follows an interlocking schedule and leads to an eventual winner.

8. Are smaller nets required for the U7 Game Play Model?
There is no requirement to use smaller nets for U7 games. With goaltenders in full equipment in net, regular nets (4x6) are a suitable option. However, small nets (3x4) are also acceptable.

9. Is there a need to draw the crease for the nets?
There is no need to draw a crease for the nets. Each net should be placed just inside the circle, which will provide a small marking to aid the goaltender in positioning themselves in front of the net. If there is no circle, a crease may be drawn on the ice.

10. What are the advantages of practicing in small areas and playing cross-ice games?
Small spaces equate to more engagement in the play and more activity for young players. Through small-area station-based practices and cross-ice games, players are closer to the play at all times and have much more opportunity for puck touches. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, their opportunities to be engaged in the play are doubled when the playing area is smaller. NHL analytics research has illustrated that all skill areas of the game increased substantially when players played in small spaces more suited to their age and skill level.

11. What are the dimensions of a cross-ice hockey game?
The average dimensions of a regular ice surface in Canada is 200 feet by 85 feet, with some rinks 200 feet by 100 feet. The cross-ice surface can be a maximum of 100 feet by 60 feet if the dividers are placed at the blue-line.

12. Is it a requirement to use a blue puck instead of a black puck and what are the advantages?
It is NOT a requirement to use a blue puck for U7 hockey. The regulation black puck weighs six ounces, while the blue puck weighs four ounces. Scaling down all aspects of practice and game play for players six and under is very beneficial. The blue puck is an appropriate weight in relation to the height and weight of these young players. Use of the blue puck can promote proper mechanics in shooting, passing and carrying the puck.

13. Should U7 be tiered?
Grouping of players of similar ability can be a very important principle for setting young players up for success and enjoyment. The focus of the U7 Game Play Model is player development. It is important in both station-based practices and in cross-ice game play that players be grouped by similar ability levels when possible.

It is recommended that prior to the start of cross-ice games, coaches of opposing teams may wish to discuss possible line combinations to ensure that the skill level of the players on the ice is similar; this will allow more puck touches and fun for all the players participating.

14. Do the officials need to be fully registered?
This is at the discretion of the Member, if they choose to use officials and the one-official system. If the Member chooses not to use officials at U7, then properly registered volunteers can oversee game play.

15. If you choose to use registered officials, do the officials have to wear the full officiating uniform?
If the Member elects to have officials work the U7 Game Play Model, all officials on the ice need to wear the minimum of an officiating jersey with Member crest, black pants and a black CSA-approved helmet with a CSA-approved half visor.

16. If you choose to use registered officials, do the on-ice officiating shadows/mentors have to wear an officiating uniform?
No – in situations where an on-ice shadow/mentor is supporting the official, it is appropriate for them to wear a Member tracksuit. They still must wear a black CSA-approved helmet with CSA-approved half visor.

17. How does the official or coach keep game flow and not lose time on shifts when a puck goes out of play?
Officials are encouraged to keep additional pucks in their pocket in the event a puck is shot out of play. The official will simply provide a new puck to the non-offending team and play will resume.

18. What support is available for coaches at the U7 level?
The NCCP Community Coach Stream – Coach 1 - Intro to Coach Clinic is designed for U7 coaches who need to understand the proper instructional approach with children at this age. The Community Coach Stream clinic is part of the new online NCCP Coaching Clinic available through the online Hockey University.

Recognizing the necessity to provide a positive experience for young hockey players, the Community Coach Stream – Coach 1 Clinic builds upon a number of values providing a qualitative experience, which include:

- Providing a safe environment in which to be introduced to fundamental skills.
- Developing an understanding of basic teamwork through participation in structured activities and adapted game-like situations.
- Introducing participants to the concepts of fair and cooperative play.
- Refining basic motor patterns and building self-confidence.
- Providing an environment that challenges individuals positively and rewards the participants for their efforts.
- Providing opportunities to experience a number of activities related in the building of a lifestyle of fitness and activity.

In addition to coach education, the U7 Skills Manual is a set of ice-session plans that are designed for the age-appropriate and skill-specific needs of young U7 players. These ice-session plans are available through the Hockey Canada Network, Drill Hub and at HockeyCanada.ca.

19. What guidelines should be followed when storing and setting up equipment at community arenas?
Each facility in Canada is unique and will have its own standard operating procedures when it comes to the storage, set-up and take-down of the portable board system or foam divider system. In many cases, municipalities have developed procedures to apply to all arenas within their jurisdiction.
It will be important to work with facility management to ensure proper protocols are being followed. This will maximize efficiency, ensure safe practices for all and promote a harmonious relationship between the arena staff and members of the local minor hockey association.

20. Where can portable boards or foam barriers be purchased?
There are a number of suppliers for portable boards, foam barriers and small nets. It is advisable to check local sources to ensure best pricing on the shipping of products.

On a national level, two suppliers handle large-volume orders for these products:

OmniSport Inc.	**Athletica Sport Systems Inc.**
14 Boulder Blvd.	554 Parkside Drive
Stony Plain, AB T7Z IV7	Waterloo, ON N2L 5Z4
780-968-2344	519-747-1856 / 877-778-5911
www.omnisport.ca	www.athletica.com

Section 7: Member Recommendation Amendments

Member Recommendation Amendments

Section 8:
U7 Officiating Procedures

Role of the Official

NOTE: SEE U7 POLICY FOR GAME-SPECIFIC RULES IN SECTION 2

Introduction

Hockey Canada recommends the inclusion of officials at the U7 level. At this level, a one-official system will be employed. While this is not an official Hockey Canada Officiating Program (HCOP) system, this section provides an outline to assist local officiating programs with integrating officials into this developmental stage of the game. The system provides officials with an opportunity to experience several aspects of officiating, while keeping the operating costs at a manageable level for the teams and minor hockey associations. **Games may be officiated by team coaches as well.**

Benefits of Involving Officials in Cross-Ice Hockey

There are numerous benefits for officials when considering the aspects of building foundational skills. This is a valuable opportunity for newer officials to put on their uniform, get on the ice in live action and learn basic aspects of being an official in a less formal and positive atmosphere. Basic skills include dropping pucks, skating skills, foundational positioning, spatial awareness, establishing good sightlines and making decisions such as goals and minor infractions.

This allows officials to apply newly-acquired information they received in their clinic in a game environment. It also provides an excellent opportunity for senior officials to mentor newcomers by shadowing them on the ice or evaluating them from the stands.

Having an official for cross-ice games provides players with more structure. It also presents a more realistic game environment, while allowing the coaches to keep their focus on the players.

Officiating Procedures

Flexibility is an important component to operating in a one-official system within the U7 structure. There is no absolute way to handle every possible scenario. However, game flow and establishing a basic structure to the game is the primary focus. Officials will NOT be required to call infractions for icing or off-side as the appropriate rink dimensions and markings are not available.

Face-offs

There will be one face-off location. This will be located approximately halfway between the goals (see Figure 5.1). Coaches and arena staff may mark the centre face-off location with a temporary marking for game play purposes.

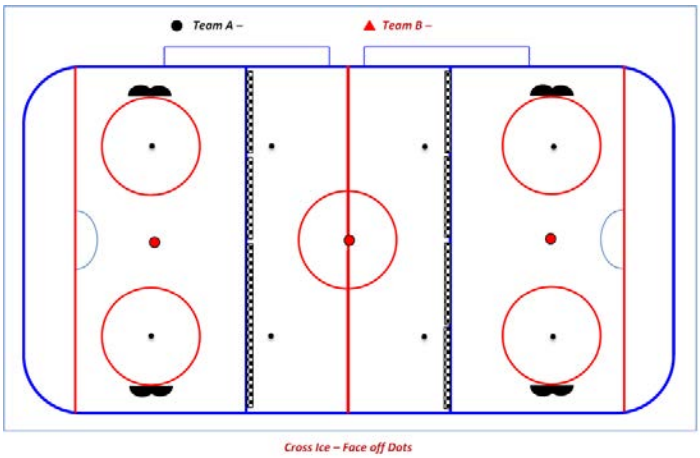


FIGURE 5.1: Location of the face-off dot

Positioning

Foundational positioning principles will be used. The concept of the 'cone' should be reserved for when full-ice play begins. Under the half-ice structure, approximate positioning should be used to get officials comfortable with their proximity to the goal (see Figure 6). Officials should follow the play approximately 2-3 metres behind the puck carrier. They should remain about one metre from the boards or playing area perimeters. The examples on Figure 6 show guidelines for establishing recommended end-zone positions.

Officials are encouraged to move towards the net on goal situations and away from the play towards the boards as play comes towards them, allowing players to pass by; the official can then follow at a safe distance.

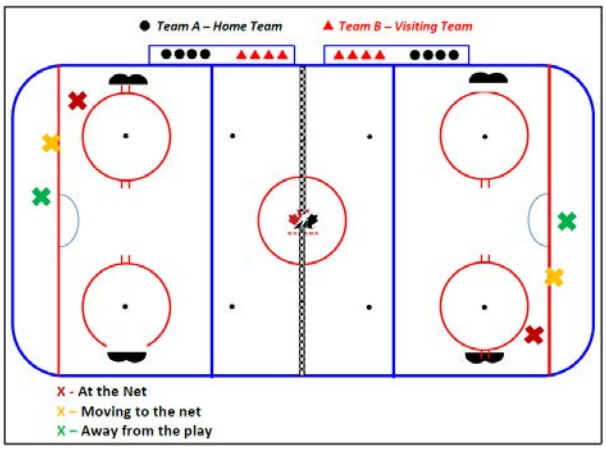


FIGURE 6: Cross-ice positioning of the official

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