



HOCKEY ALBERTA

INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE



ALBERTA AMATEUR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

Section 1: Intro to Hockey	2
Section 2: Rationale for Intro to Hockey Programming	4
Section 3: Game Play Guidelines and Rules of Play	7
Section 4: Novice Game Play Officiating Guidelines	12
Section 5: Frequently Asked Questions	16

April 2018

Section 1: Intro to Hockey

The future of hockey lies with today's youth.

Because of this, Hockey Canada and Hockey Alberta have developed age appropriate programming to encourage the growth of foundational skills for young players in hockey. Minor hockey associations and coaches lead the implementation of the Initiation and Novice programs with the assistance of volunteers, parents and others associated with hockey.



The programming must provide opportunities for a wide range of people to get involved to improve the quality of the hockey experience through sound instruction and enjoyable play.

How a player gets his/her initial taste of hockey is crucial. Their first four years of hockey must be a positive experience full of fun and excitement. If the beginner has fun and develops some basic skills and builds confidence, there is a good chance they will go on to enjoy hockey for life.

In 1995, Hockey Canada passed a motion requiring the Initiation Program 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. The Hockey Canada Initiation Program serves as a structured, learn to play hockey program designed to introduce players aged 5-8 to the game's basic skills in an atmosphere of fun and fair play.

Hockey Canada then took the next step, making it mandatory that all games are played on cross ice/half ice starting in the 2016-17 season for Initiation age category (ages 5 and 6) participants, and in the 2019-20 season for Novice age category (ages 7 and 8) participants.

Effective for the 2019-20 season, Initiation and Novice hockey in Alberta will run under the title **Intro to Hockey**. The goals and objectives of **Intro to Hockey** programming are to:

- Teach the basic skills of hockey so players can enjoy the game,
- Assist in the development and enhancement of physical literacy and basic motor patterns,
- Deliver a program that is age appropriate for the size, skill and age of the players,
- Encourage the aspects of fitness, fair play and co-operation while having fun playing the game.



INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE

A minor hockey association's programming at the **Intro to Hockey** level will serve as an important building block upon which the entire minor hockey association is built. Youngsters at every level of play benefit from getting the “right start” in the game.

GROUPING OF PARTICIPANTS

Intro to Hockey participants will be split into single birth years.

Division Name	Age as of Dec. 31	Division Name	Age as of Dec. 31
Minor Initiation	5-year olds	Minor Novice	7-year olds
Major Initiation	6-year olds	Major Novice	8-year olds
* Combined Initiation	5- and 6-year olds	* Combined Novice	7- and 8-year olds

* If an association does not have enough participants to create single birth year age divisions, combined (2 year) age divisions are acceptable. *

PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT

Full Ice Practice: 2-4 teams on ice - Half Ice Practice: 1-2 teams on ice

PRACTICE FORMAT	
Energizer Drill	Engage players through a fun game or unstructured drill to start.
3-5 Station Setup	Focus on technical skill development by utilizing circuits & continuous drills.
Finisher Drill	Fun small area game, relay race or high energy activity to finish.

When splitting up players for station work in practices separate based on skill so all players can be challenged by enabling coaches to progress and regress drills as needed based on the skill set of each station group.

Implementing a deliberate age appropriate program at the **Intro to Hockey** level will give the participants in your association the upper hand in “reaching their potential” as hockey players. The game is about the kids who play, and it is time to give the game back to them.

A wide variety of materials are available on the Hockey Canada website, and on the Hockey Alberta website:

<https://www.hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/hockey-programs/coaching/initiation>

<https://www.hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/hockey-programs/coaching/novice>

<https://www.hockeyalberta.ca>

Section 2: Rationale for Intro to Hockey Programming

Benefits of Half Ice Games

"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, Canadian National Men's Team



Hockey Canada – Long Term Player Development Model

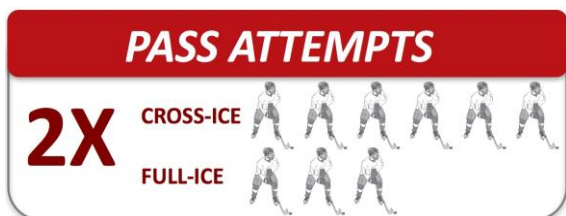
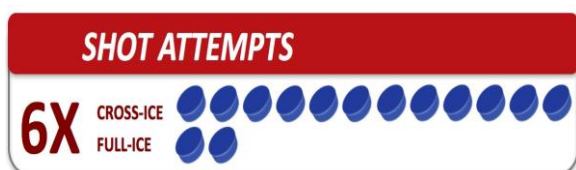
Parents and coaches need to think long term and not worry too much about children being the best player on the ice in Initiation and Novice hockey. Putting young players in a competitive environment to early will compromise the child's development. Children should only be placed in to competitive situations that suit their skill level and abilities. Parents and coaches must be realistic about what children should be able to do all age levels. The Hockey Canada's Long Term Player Development strategy is very important.

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

- Increased emphasis on skating skills including agility, balance, coordination and quickness.
- The number of puck battles increases significantly.
- Puck control and puck protection skills are enhanced resulting in more confidence.
- The fundamentals of skating, puck control, passing, and shooting are reinforced.
- Less time and space increase the frequency and speed of making hockey decisions.
- A more challenging environment offered to improve ice awareness and elevate hockey sense.
- Increased intensity of competition results through the progressive skill improvement of players.
- The increase in incidental body contact requires players to play with their heads up and acquire spatial awareness.
- Players improve in the areas of contact confidence and body contact.

INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE

A quick statistical summary illustrates the advantages of the smaller-surface games model.



Small spaces equate to more engaged in the play:

- All players are close 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 increase by double when the playing areas is smaller.

A very large difference between full ice and small areas:

- There are 6 times as many shots on goal or at goal in a cross-ice or half ice game.
- Players are closer to the puck at all times and the puck finds its way to the net much more often.
- Goalies are more engaged and feel a bigger part of the game.

Shrinking the playing surface increases offense:

- Players are much closer to the nets, skate shorter distance from goal to goal, and have increased opportunities for offensive play.
- Goalies are forced to make more saves thus increasing their development.

More of a team game is apparent:

- In the smaller area games, players are observed passing and attempting to pass the puck more often. This results for two reasons:
 - All players are close enough to pressure the puck more frequently.
 - Teammates are in close support of the puck carry at all times.

Short quick passes find their mark:

- In smaller spaces, more passes are attempted and most of these passes are 5 to 10 feet in length.
- When passes are shorter, accuracy improves, and players tend to have more success receiving the pass.
- Players also start to understand the importance of puck possession.

Hockey Alberta Skating Study

Acceleration

- Skating acceleration speeds increased as the ice surface size was reduced.

Top Speed

- Average distance players needed to reach top speed was 65 feet.
- Advanced skaters reached top speed in 60 feet or less.

What does it mean?

- Effective skating is a combination of turns, pivots, stops, starts and transitions.
- NHL's No. 1 skill isn't top speed; it's the ability to change speeds and accelerate quickly.
- Cross Ice / Half Ice trains players to skate the game, rather than simply skating fast in straight lines.



"The flat out use of maximum speed in hockey simply doesn't happen very often. What does happen is that you have to be adjusting, changing, going forward, backward, lateral, always turning and moving toward the puck: that's agility skating... smaller areas generate more stops, starts and turns."

Dr. George Kingston
Former NHL and Team Canada Head Coach



INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE

Section 3: Game Play Guidelines and Rules

SEASONAL STRUCTURE

The Seasonal structure can take many forms. This section identifies a set of minimum standards to which Hockey Alberta's membership must adhere under Intro to Hockey programming. There is flexibility for timelines, as season start dates vary by association. The number of games and practices are recommendations based on what Hockey Canada has set out in the Long-Term Player Development Model.

1. DEVELOPMENT PHASE

During the development phase, coaches should be focused on skill development. The Hockey Canada 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.

2. REGULAR SEASON PHASE

The regular season phase represents the bulk of the seasonal structure. It is important that coaches continue to focus on skill development during practice sessions, using resources such as the Hockey Canada Skills Manual. Hockey Canada has developed additional resources to support coaches in their efforts to deliver practice plans. The Hockey Canada Network, the Drill Hub at www.hockeycanada.ca, and the Hockey Canada website section for the Initiation and Novice Programs all contain age appropriate and skill specific resources for Intro to Hockey players.

INTRO TO HOCKEY SEASONAL STRUCTURE		
Months	September - October	November - March
Phase	Development	Regular
Approx. Dates	Sept. 15 – Oct. 31	Nov. 1 – Mar. 22
Ice Sessions (Maximum)	Development Season	Regular Season
26 Weeks	6 Weeks	20 Weeks
50 Practices	12 Practices	38 Practices
25 Games	2 Games	23 Games
3 Jamborees / Festivals	0 Jamborees / Festivals	3 Jamborees / Festivals
Seasonal Practice to Game Ratio:	2:1	
Maximum Ice Sessions per Week:	2 or 3	
Ideal Ice Sessions:	Weekdays, no earlier than 5:00 pm Weekends, no earlier than 8:00 am	

GAME PLAY GUIDELINES

The Game Play format is referred to as the **Two – Four Team Game Play Model** (see Figure 1). This model is built to allow up to four Initiation teams playing one another or two Novice teams playing one another in two halves. For larger Initiation teams or for two Novice teams divided in two units, each team is required to have two goaltenders, one for each half-ice game.

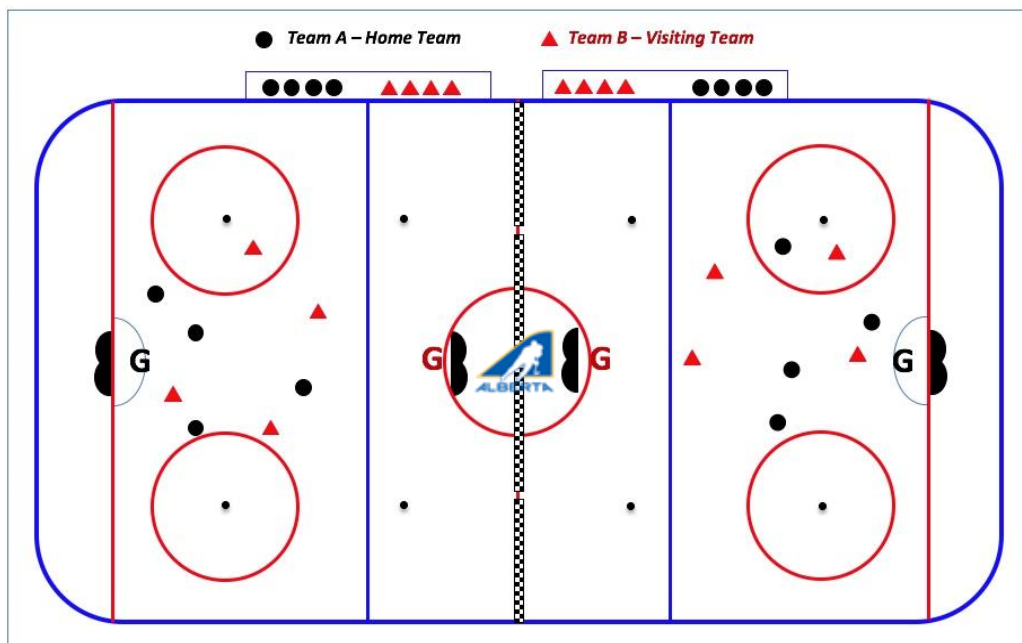


FIGURE 1: Two Team – Two Half Ice Game Model

In communities where team composition is smaller, the ice is still divided in halves, but only one half will be used for game play. The other half can be used as a practice surface for a third team (see Figure 2).

- Each team consists of up to a maximum of 18 players divided in to two units of 9. Each team unit of 9 players will have 1 goaltender and 8 skaters. Smaller numbers allow for players to double shift to ensure there are always 4 players on the ice. Coaches must make sure all players take turns double shifting.



- It is recommended that in each half of the ice, the centre spot should be marked to indicate where the face off will take place. This mark is to be established at the midpoint between both nets.

INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE

- When play is stopped due to the goaltender freezing the puck or a goal being scored, the referee or coach will signal the attacking players to back off 3 metres. Once the attackers have moved back, the players may resume play as soon as the possession team has the puck. In the event a puck goes out of play (over divider or glass), the referee or coach will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and the attacking team will provide a 3-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.
- When the buzzer sounds to end the first half, the visiting team will switch ends and switch benches, so players can play against the other half of the opposing team.
- Teams will share the respective player benches with each team using the gate closest to the net they are defending.
- The main score clock can be used as the time keeping device for both game simultaneously
- No score is kept, and no game sheets are necessary.

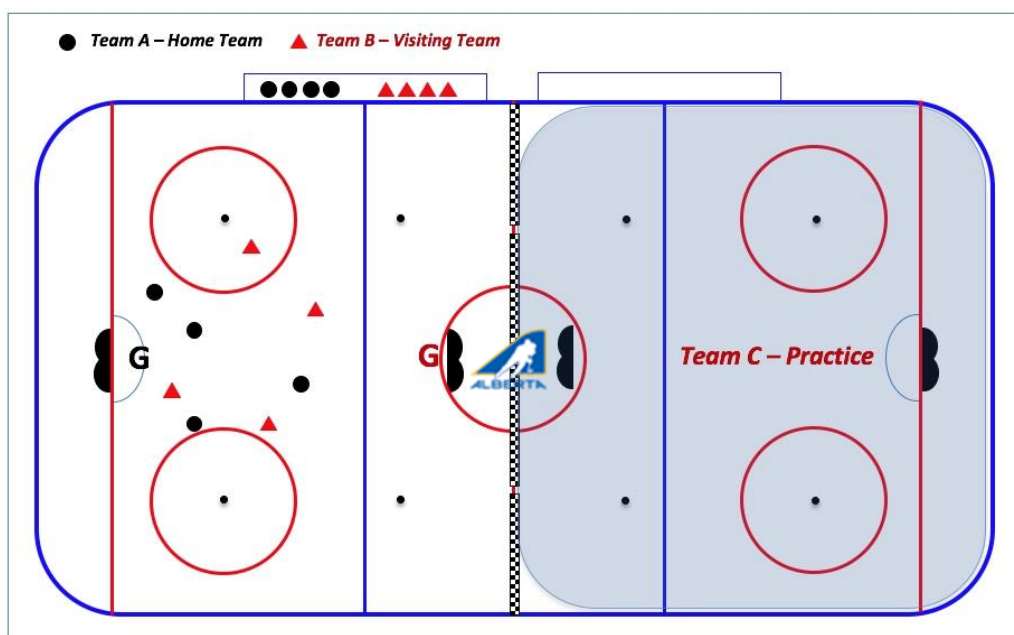


FIGURE 2: Two Team – One Half Ice Game Model – with Practice Sheet

RULES FOR HALF ICE GAME PLAY

1. PLAYING RULES

- Four vs Four format
 - each team with a goaltender (no equipment for Initiation)
- In this game model, each team is required to have two goaltenders, one for each half of the ice
- The warm up – 3 minutes
- The rink set-up:
 - One set of barriers
 - Or two sets of barriers with a small space in between for spare players
 - Game length – 48 minutes
 - Two 24-minute halves
- Shift length – 3 minutes for Initiation and 1.5 minutes for Novice with an automatic buzzer or whistle sounding to indicate players change. The clock runs throughout the 24-minute half.
 - Both games are synchronized
 - Officials or Coaches work together to keep the games synchronized.
- Players change on the fly
 - If there are fewer than 4 players on the bench, the active player designated to stay out for the following shift must tag up at the bench prior to racing to play the loose puck
 - For Initiation the first player to enter the ice on a line change is the new goalie
- There will be two face-offs during the game:
 - The first face off will start the game, and
 - The second face off will start the second half



2. SHIFTS

- Player shifts are recommended to be (3) minutes for Initiation and (1.5) minutes for Novice in length. A buzzer or whistle will sound to signal line changes.
- When the buzzer/whistle sounds, players must relinquish control of the puck immediately and vacate the ice. The new players enter onto the ice surface immediately.
- Failure to immediately relinquish control of the puck at the buzzer or new players entering the ice surface prematurely will result in a change of possession.

3. CHANGE OF POSSESSION

- Goaltender freezes the puck – the attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession
- Puck shot out of play – the offending team backs off and the official gives the non-offending team a new puck



4. PENALTIES (ONLY APPLICABLE FOR NOVICE HOCKEY)

Penalties shall be called in accordance with the Hockey Canada Officiating Program (HCOP) standard of play, within a learning environment where new officials are learning the application of the rules.





Section 4: Novice Game Play Officiating Guidelines

ROLE OF THE OFFICIAL

1. INTRODUCTION

Hockey Canada recommends the use of a one (1) official system. This is not an official Hockey Canada Officiating Program (HCOP) system, so this section provides an outline to assist local officiating programs with integrating officials into this developmental stage of the game.

2. BENEFITS OF INVOLVING OFFICIALS IN HALF ICE HOCKEY

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

Officials can apply newly acquired information they received in their clinic in a game environment. This format also provides an excellent opportunity for senior officials to mentor newcomers by shadowing them on the ice or evaluating them from the stands. The ability to mentor officials at ice level in this structure provides instantaneous feedback and assists in preparing these officials for full ice games in a two (2) or three (3) official system.

Having an official on the ice for the half-ice games provides players with more structure than at the Initiation level. It also presents a more realistic game environment, while allowing the coaches to focus more on the players rather than focusing on making sure the game flows.

3. OFFICIATING PROCEDURES

Flexibility is an important component to operating in a one (1) official system within the Novice game 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 icing or offside.

4. TEAMS

Individual Minor Hockey Associations can choose how many players are on a team. The recommended game play format is 4 vs 4 and the ideal number of players on a team in the Two Team Two Game model is up to 18 with each half ice team comprised of 8 skaters and 1 goaltender.

5. FACE-OFFS

There is one (1) face-off location, located approximately half way between the goals (see Figure 3). Coaches and arena staff may mark the centre face-off location with a temporary marking for game play purposes.

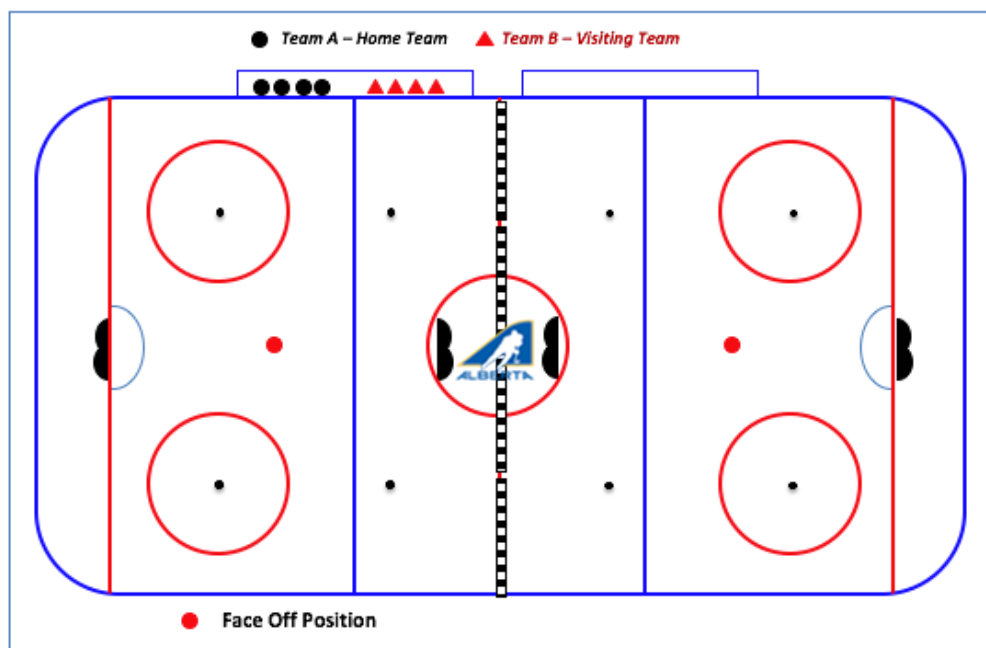


Figure 3: Location of the Face off dot



INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE

6. FROZEN PUCKS, STOPPAGES, AND GAME FLOW

The line change procedure does not require a stoppage of play. Associations have the choice of shift length with running time and players changing on the fly. The referee blows the whistle to indicate a change of possession when:

- a goalkeeper freezes the puck
- the puck leaves the playing area

In the case of a goalie freezing the puck, the official awards possession of the puck to the goalie's teammate. In the case of a puck shot out of play, the official awards a new puck to the non-offending team and the team committing the offence is required to back off 3 metres.

7. GOALS

When the puck enters the goal, the official will blow the whistle and signal a goal, retrieve the puck from the net and allow the team that was scored on to take possession of the puck. The team that scored backs off 3 metres and gives the player with the puck room to start the play.

8. PENALTIES

Penalties shall be called in accordance with the Hockey Canada Officiating Program (HCOP) standard of play, within a learning environment where new officials are learning how to apply the rules.

Minor penalties are noted by the official by briefly raising the arm to indicate a penalty will be assessed. At the end of the shift, the official notifies the coach about the infraction and the number of the offending player.

- If the offending team controls the puck after the infraction, the official blows the whistle and calls for a change of possession and the non-offending team is given room to play the puck (3-metre cushion).
- The offending player is required to sit out next shift, but the team will play even strength (4 on 4).

Should an infraction occur that would normally require a player to be ejected from the game (e.g. Game Misconduct, Match penalty or Gross Misconduct), then the player will be removed from the remainder of that game. Even under these circumstances teams will not play shorthanded and no game incident report will be required.

9. 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 the official comfortable with proximity to the goal (see Figure 4). Officials should follow the play approximately 2 – 3 metres behind the puck carrier. They should remain about 1 metre from the boards or playing area perimeters. The examples on the diagram below show guidelines for establishing recommended end-zone positions.

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

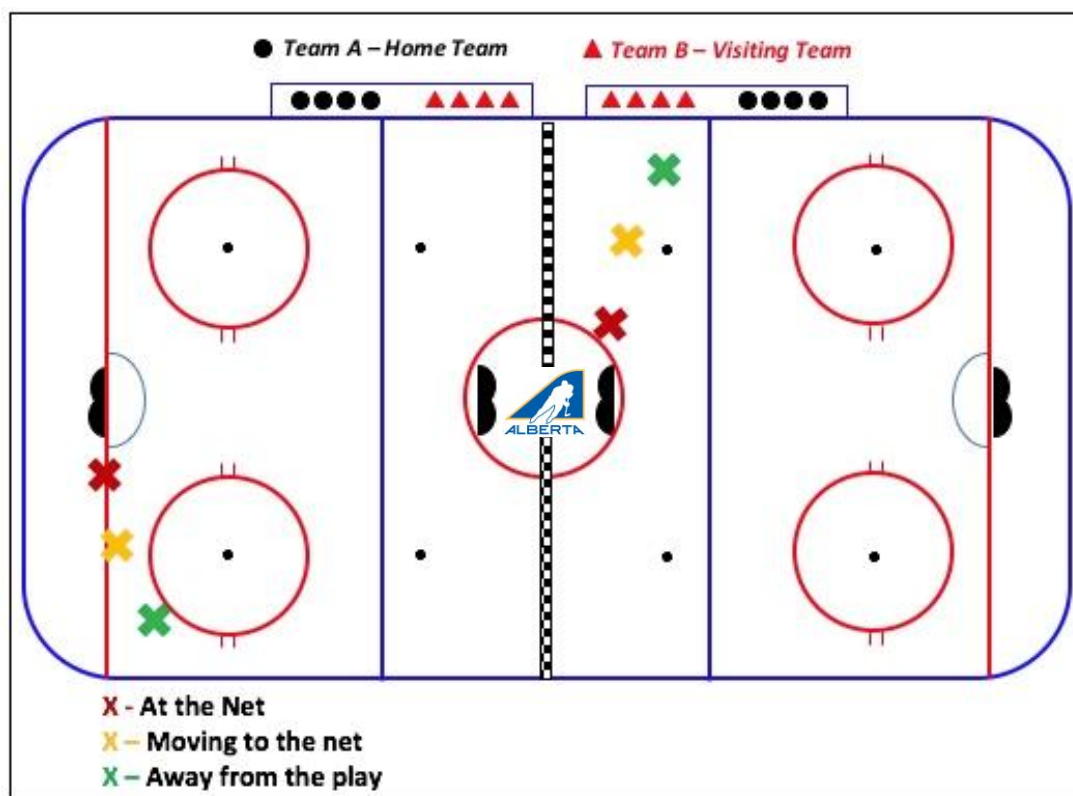


Figure 4: End Zone Positioning of the Official

Section 5: Frequently Asked Questions

1. *How will player development be affected if there are no offside or icing called during game play?*

The game play model is a 4 vs 4 model on half 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, pass receiving and shooting. Concepts like offside, icing, positional play and face-offs (which are mental skills) can be introduced when players move to the full ice game play model in the transition to Atom hockey.

2. *Are teams permitted to identify a full-time goaltender?*

All players should have an opportunity to play goal and all players should rotate through the goalie position throughout the season. The Hockey Canada Long Term Player Development philosophy encourages a wide range of skill development at a young age and focusing on a single position may limit a child's opportunity to practice skills in all areas.



3. *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 teams to play one another. Games will be competitive but the emphasis is on fun and fair play.

A tournament is defined as a schedule of games played among three (3) or more teams, which follows an interlocking schedule and leads to an eventual winner. Tournaments are not recommended for Intro to Hockey.

4. *Is there a need to draw the crease in for the net situated in the neutral zone?*

No. Each net should be placed just inside the centre circle which will provide a small marking to aid the goaltender with positioning in front of the net. The centre circle line will be used as the goal line for the neutral zone net.

5. *What are the advantages of practicing in small areas and playing half-ice games?*

Small spaces equate to more engaged in the play and activity for young players. Through small area station-based practices and half ice games, players are closer to the play and have much more opportunity to be engaged in the game. Regardless of the skill level or the ability of each player, opportunities to be engaged in the play double when the playing area is smaller. The NHL Analytics research illustrated that all skill areas of the game increased substantially when players played in small spaces more suited to their age and skill level.

6. *What are the dimensions of a half-ice hockey game?*

The average dimensions of a regular ice surface in Canada are 200 feet by 85 feet. The half-ice playing surface can be a maximum of 100' by 85' if the dividers are placed at the centre red line. In a study conducted by Hockey Alberta, the half-ice playing surface illustrated the same stride distance for a child as relative to the full sheet of ice for an adult.

7. *Is it a requirement to use a Blue Puck and what are the advantages?*

It is a recommendation to use a Blue Puck for all Intro to Hockey Programming. The regulation Black Puck weighs 6 ounces. The Blue Puck weighs 4 ounces. Scaling down all aspects of practice and game play for players 8 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 will promote proper mechanics in shooting, passing, and carrying the puck.



8. *Should players and/or teams be tiered?*

Grouping of players of like ability can be a very important principle for setting up young players for success and enjoyment. The focus of the Intro to Hockey model is player development. It is important in both station-based practices and in half-ice game play that players be grouped by similar ability levels when possible or necessary.

It is recommended that prior to the start of the half-ice game(s) 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 which will allow more puck touches and fun for all the players participating.

9. *Do the officials in Novice have to wear the full officiating uniform?*

If officials are working games in the Novice Half Ice Model, all officials on the ice need to wear the minimum of an officiating jersey with Hockey Alberta crest, black pants and a black CSA approved helmet with a CSA approved half visor.

10. *Do the on-ice shadows / mentors for Novice have to wear an officiating uniform?*

No. In situations where an on-ice shadow / mentor is on the ice supporting the official it is appropriate for them to wear a tracksuit; however, they still must wear a black CSA approved helmet with CSA approved half visor.



INTRO TO HOCKEY RESOURCE GUIDE

11. How does the official or coach keep game flow and not lose time on shifts when a puck goes out of play?

Officials and Coaches are encouraged to keep additional pucks in their pockets in the event a puck is shot out of play. The official will provide a new puck to the non-offending team and play will resume.

12. What guidelines should be followed when storing and setting up equipment at community arenas?

Each facility in Alberta is unique and will have its own Standard Operating Procedures when it comes to the storage, the set-up, and the take down of the portable board system or the foam divider system. In many cases, municipalities have developed these procedures to apply to all arenas within their jurisdiction.

It will be important to work with the facility's management to ensure that 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.

13. Where can portable boards or foam barriers be purchased?

There are numerous suppliers for portable boards, foam barriers, and small nets. It is advisable to check local sources to ensure best pricing on the shipping of product.



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

OmniSport Inc
14 Boulder Blvd.
Stony Plain, AB
T7Z 1V7
Phone: 780-968-2344

<http://www.omnisport.ca>

Athletica Sport Systems Inc.
554 Parkside Drive
Waterloo, ON
N2L 5Z4
Phone: 519-747-1856
Toll-free: 1-877-778-5911
<http://athletica.com>