

Hockey Player Sleep Number Equals Ten

Youth hockey players are growing and developing young people who need anywhere from 9 to 11 hours of sleep **every night** to insure they are rested for school and rested to play hockey and other sports in the fall and spring. The problem is that many associations do not schedule their teams to allow all of the players an adequate amount of sleep.

In the larger associations especially, the rule seems to be that the bantams skate late based on the old theory “that is the way it has always been”. One might agree that this makes sense because the older players would tend to stay up later anyways so they might as well play hockey from 8:30 pm until 10:00 PM or later.

But there is a flaw in this thinking. The net result for a team that skates 4 schools nights a week beginning after 8:15 PM is that by the end of each week the players have been deprived of as much as 30 hours of much needed sleep. That is 120 hours a month of lost sleep.

Here is how it works. The game or practice ends at 10:00 PM. The players are home anywhere from 10:30 to 11:30 PM depending on how far they had to travel to the rink. An after skating snack is normally in order and then to bed by midnight. Especially following games there is some wind down time required before being able to sleep. Many of our schools begin at 7:15 AM for the older players and 8:30 AM for the younger ones. So the older kids are up at 6:30 AM to get dressed, fed and off to school. For the typical bantam player this schedule results in about 7 hours of sleep per night that he plays hockey. Repeat this 4 or 5 times a week and you have exhausted kids in the course of a month. They cannot sleep long enough on the weekend mornings to make up for the lost hours during the week. They would normally need to sleep past 10:00 AM just to get their 10 hours for that night.

It is common sense that tired kids do not perform well in school or at the rink and there are statistics to prove it. As a bantam coach for the past 5 years, I have witnessed many a sleepy face and yawns before the beginning of our ice sessions. It is very difficult to teach tired athletes, and I am sure their teachers feel the same during the school day.

The answer to the problem is really fairly simple. All of the teams from squirts to bantams in a program rotate through the available time slots so that no team skates late two nights in a row or more than two school nights a week. Other solutions include off ice training in lieu of ice time, more days off and shared ice sessions. It is the responsibility of the coaches and parents to insure that the players are getting an adequate amount of sleep each week during the critical growing years of 10-15 years old.

I have not included the Junior Gold and U-16 skaters because they typically do not skate as many times per week as the bantam and pee wee teams and they play a somewhat shorter schedule. The same results will occur however for these players if they incur multiple late nights each week.

Maybe it is time to think of the well being of the players when we schedule our programs. It takes more effort to provide a revolving schedule that insures that the players get an adequate amount of rest but it is worth it. They all might even skate a few nights less, but it is the right thing to do.

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