

NEW BEGINNINGS

With too many kids feeling burned out or left out of hockey, there's no better time for the ADM. This brand-new day for USA Hockey starts with the idea that we need to let kids be kids. That they and their families need to get the most out of hockey – without feeling like they need to be the next NHL superstar. What follows that idea are guidelines designed to help kids play, love and excel in hockey.

The main goal of ADM is to provide a brighter future for all. All ages. All talent levels. All organizations. All of hockey. And we will accomplish that goal by changing the way we think about youth hockey in the United States.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH WHERE WE'RE ALREADY GOING? For starters, many athletes spend too much time traveling, competing and recovering from competition and not enough time

preparing for it. Second, there is too heavy a focus on the result rather than the performance. This attitude leads to long-term failure, as coaches forgo the development of skills to focus on specific game tactics. And third, too many athletes are specializing too early on. An early focus on just one or two sports often leads to injuries, burnout and capping athletic potential.

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Jack Parker, head men's ice hockey coach at Boston University (2009 NCAA champions), is a big proponent of the principles of ADM. "Kids play too many [hockey] games too early. And specialization is really hurting our sport. Kids shouldn't play hockey year-round. They need to play other sports."

TOOLS, NOT RULES

Keep in mind that ADM is a set of guidelines designed to boost the prospects of youth hockey in the United States. It is by no means a mandate. But research does tell us that it provides the best framework to develop not only better hockey players, but better kids.

SO HOW CAN ADM HELP KIDS? First, ADM focuses on letting kids develop at a pace that matches their physical and mental age group. This is accomplished by looking at a kid's stage of development and training them accordingly. Age-appropriate training will better pull out their potential. Second, ADM encourages parents to support the efforts of athletes and encourage fair play, effort, skill development and individual improvements, instead of constant competition. Competition as part of a kid's development is overrated – especially for 7- to 12-year-olds. And third, ADM shifts the focus away from stats and win/loss records and concentrates on the process of improvement. While athletes should always try to win, winning is not the most important factor – learning from our sport is.

COST BENEFIT Reducing the cost to play hockey is an ongoing effort of USA Hockey, and ADM helps address that by encouraging kids of all skill levels to play and develop together on the same sheet of ice. Not only will kids grow better together, more kids on the ice means a lower overall cost per player.

