

Kansas City Stars Hockey Director's Spring 2012 Update

Now that the 2011-12 fall/winter hockey season is over, this is a great opportunity to update our Stars families to recap last season and share exciting information about the upcoming 2012-13 season.

First, thank you to all of the coaches, team managers and most of all, parents, who give your children the opportunity to play the great game of hockey!

Second, thanks once again for the dedication and efforts of our Stars administrator, Mary Helmick. Mary works tirelessly at the house, travel and regional affiliate levels to make certain that our organization provides the best hockey experience possible for our players and families.

As you know, following significant research studies, USA Hockey implemented two major changes last year. First, aggressive body checking was eliminated at the Pee Wee (U12) level. Second, cross-ice play was mandated at the mite (U8) and atom (U6) levels. Each of these mandates required major changes in thinking and education among our coaches, players and parents. Despite some initial confusion and resistance, it is clear that USA Hockey's data was correct and both changes were a great success.

An especially huge "thank you" goes to Paul Antonenko. We were very lucky that Paul and his family moved here last season from Minnesota just in time for the implementation of the USA Hockey American Development Model (ADM - <http://www.admkids.com/mission.php>) and cross-ice hockey. Paul's prior organization in Minnesota had already adopted these programs and he was instrumental in helping all of us understand and implement these changes effectively. As a result, our players received more ice time and coaching focused on age-appropriate skill development. Based upon the success of our mite (U8) house teams, it is obvious that the ADM model works and our players are having fun and improving at an accelerated rate.

The elimination of "body checking" was intended to stop aggressive and open-ice checking with injury potential. As a Pee Wee (U12) coach myself, I saw that this change did not eliminate body contact completely. Very quickly, the players adapted and learned the skill of skating to establish body position to obtain and maintain puck possession. The games were safer. The players were forced to focus on skating and skill development which results in better overall hockey players. I believe USA Hockey will continue to evaluate and promote proper use of the body even at the younger age groups. At the same time, there will continue to be measures taken to discourage and eliminate dangerous, punishing and intimidating body checks so all players can have fun, learn and develop age appropriate skills.

Our house coaches did a tremendous job learning and implementing the ADM model with a focus on fun and skill development. They worked closely together to organize teams and maintain parity and balance among the teams. I will be working with Paul Antonenko to schedule on-ice and off-ice coaching classes to supplement USA Hockey certification programs during the player evaluations in late summer and early fall. We will continue to focus on age appropriate skills and drills based upon the ADM model and other USA Hockey recommended curriculums at all age groups. Our goal is to provide the best, well educated and informed coaches in the City at both the travel and house levels.

Our travel hockey program also thrived last season. Our teams competed in the MoHockey (St. Louis) league and the Midwest Hockey League (MHL). Our first year in the MoHockey league was a tremendous success, with five of our seven teams entering the post-season tournament ranked in the top three in their division. Our Bantam A2 team won it all!!! Our teams were able to play a wide variety of competitive opponents within a reasonable distance from home, thus keeping travel time and expense to a minimum. The games were competitive, fun and exciting. We were excited to learn from the MoHockey president that the Stars have already been accepted again for next season.

The MHL rolled out a new flexible bracketing format that resulted in a truly exciting championship tournament. Our Pee Wee A/A2 team won their division in a thrilling overtime/shootout game. We continue to support the MHL and will be attending league meetings this Spring and Fall to discuss additional ways to build on last year's success and continue to improve the league.

Our new practice format of combined 90 minute sessions was a huge success. We were able to utilize ice time much more efficiently and effectively. Each player received an extra hour of ice each week. Our players went from 46 hours to about 70 hours of practice ice per player. Our coaches did a tremendous job of working together to prepare and execute excellent ADM based practices.

At the Midget AA U18 and U16 Levels, the Stars were again well represented by Gary Emmons' Jets High School Team with the Varsity winning the Western Division and finishing second in the Midwest High School Hockey League playoffs. The JV squad won the regular season League title for a third consecutive year. The Jets high school program was established by the Stars to provide players a path to pursue competitive hockey in their high school years. Jets players continue to graduate to the Junior and College hockey ranks, including Tier II and III Juniors, NCAA Div. III and ACHA Div. 1 College Hockey. It is our hope all serious competitive Stars travel players take advantage of this opportunity during their high school years.

Unification of youth hockey remains a topic of discussion, particularly at the travel level. We continue to believe that unified hockey in KC would make for better teams and allow for more coordinated coaching and player development opportunities. Players would be allowed to play at the highest level suitable for their ability and development. We again reached out to the Junior Mavericks leaders to explore the feasibility of unification. However, following open and positive discussions, geographic limitations and structural differences between the organizations resulted in the Junior Mavs declining our invitation to unify, opting instead for the status quo. As such, we will again focus on building and improving the Stars programs offered to our families.

With that in mind I am announcing our travel coaches for the upcoming 2012-13 season:

Midget AA:	Gary Emmons (SJHL, Northern Michigan, AHL, NHL, IHL)
Bantam AA:	Jeff Madill (OJHL, Ohio State, AHL, NHL, IHL, UHL)
Bantam A:	Jim Krueger/Tom Tilley (OJHL, Michigan State, NHL, IHL, Europe)
Pee Wee AA:	Tab Lardner (Michigan Tech, IHL, CHL)

Pee Wee A: Kiley Hill (OHL, Laurentian Univ., IHL, ECHL, UHL, AHL)

Squirt AA: Dean Nelson

Squirt A: Jeff Musolf

Our travel coaches have all played at a high level and have over 40 years of combined college and professional hockey experience. Each coach is firmly committed to coaching and developing young athletes in a positive environment built on skill development and strength of character. We expect our players to be proud to wear the Stars uniform and to represent themselves, their families and their city with class. Travel team tryouts are currently scheduled for August 17-19 at KCIC.

Spring league hockey has already started with strong participation. Additional off-season practices, clinics, and summer camps will be posted on the Stars website (www.kcstarshockey.com). We will be providing a wide range of skill development and conditioning opportunities leading up to next season.

Last... and certainly not least... you heard it here first... **KCIC is moving forward with a second sheet of ice!!!** The new rink will be an open-air facility with a permanent roof. It is planned to be ready in November. We all know the need for more ice in Kansas City for our sport to grow and prosper. The new rink at KCIC will use modern technology to allow our players to experience the tradition of outdoor hockey. Those of us who have played outdoors or seen the NHL Winter Classic know how much fun it can be to play open air hockey.

One of our goals for many years has been to find a way to provide more ice time for our Stars house level players. We are excited because the new ice sheet will allow us to provide our house teams (Atoms through Bantams) with an extra hour of ice each week from about mid-November through March, depending on weather. The new rink will be open as long as the outdoor temperatures are below 50 degrees. There will be no increase in fees from last year to our house families for this additional hour of ice. More ice, same price! More details to come as we put together schedules in the fall.

That's all for now. Thanks again for a great season. We are really excited about next year as well. Please contact myself or Mary Helmick if you have any questions or needs. Our contact information is on the Stars website. Enjoy your summer!!!

Tom Tilley
KC Stars Hockey Director