



USA Hockey has modified its playing rules for the 14-and-Under age classification and all younger age classifications (youth and girls) to no longer legalize icing while a team is shorthanded. Beginning with the 2017-18 season, if a team ices the puck while shorthanded, it will result in a whistle followed by a defensive-zone faceoff. The team that commits an icing infraction **will** be allowed to change lines and/or players prior to the defensive-zone faceoff.

The rationale behind this rule change is twofold.

First, and most importantly, the change will encourage greater skill development for 10U, 12U and 14U players. These young athletes are in their prime skill development windows and will benefit greatly from the increased emphasis this rule change places on promoting puck possession, puck protection and play-making (as opposed to merely firing the puck down the ice, which is a low-skill tactic). Second, the change prevents a penalized team from gaining an exception to a rule (icing) that is in effect while teams are at even strength.

“We want to encourage players to get their heads up, think and make skillful, intelligent plays,” said Ken Martel, the technical director of USA Hockey’s American Development Model. “To develop problem-solving skills, we need rules that encourage players to think. Modifying the shorthanded icing rule will accomplish that. Rather than just blasting the puck down the ice, they’ll now be encouraged to skate or pass their way out of trouble, use greater touch to chip a puck out, or even take advantage of a lazy power play and go on the attack.”

Data collected from nearly 200 games played under this modified rule showed that the average number of shorthanded icings per game was only 1.81. Therefore, there were fewer than two stoppages per game due to this rule, which dispels the myth that it will ruin the flow of games and make them dramatically longer.

USA Hockey has successfully used this modified rule for more than 10 years at its National Player Development Camps. Players adapt almost immediately and more shorthanded scoring opportunities are created by the play-making mindset that it nurtures.

“Skill development and play-making is an emphasis at the professional level and it should be an absolute priority at the youth levels, so I support USA Hockey’s decision to change the rule,” said Mike Sullivan, Pittsburgh Penguins head coach and back-to-back Stanley Cup champion. “It will encourage kids to make more skill plays with the puck, and that will help develop their full potential as players.”