

Why Girls Hockey?

Thoughts on why to have girls play on a Girls' Hockey Team¹.

There are many thoughts and opinions of whether a girl should play on a Boys' or Girls' hockey team. This decision is of personal choice and should be made with input from the parents and the player. There is a lot of information to consider when making this decision and the answer is not the same for every player. This document is meant to advocate and give support to seriously consider participating in girls' hockey if it meets your skater's goals².

Girls' hockey has come a long way in recent years and now has over 50,000 registered U8 to U18 players in the US. It also exhibits the same passion, competitiveness, skill development and opportunities as boys' hockey. Yes the amount of girl only teams are less in quantity than the boys, but the amount of girls' teams is growing. There is also no rule stating that girls can't scrimmage or play against boys. Many times, you see girl only teams competing against boys' teams in games and tournaments.

Survey Says?!

A recent USA Hockey survey targeting registered girls was done to gather information on how to improve girls' hockey and their hockey experience. Over 6,000 responded to the survey. Some of the highlights:

- Almost 60% started to play hockey because one of their family members played the game.
- As girls get older, they seem to enjoy hockey more.
- The percent of respondents who reported that at least half the team is friends increased steadily across the age groups. This trend mirrored the trend in percentage of girls playing on a Girls' team, as well as the trend in the love of hockey question indicating that playing on a Girls' team was related to having more friends among teammates and also to enjoying hockey more.
- Consistently, girls who play on a Girls' team rated the love of hockey higher than those playing on Boys' teams. This was true across the age groups.
- Girls who play on a Boys' team were also more likely to quit. Of the girls who said that they did not plan on playing hockey the next year, 79% were playing on a Boys' team, compared to 44% who were playing on a Girls' team.
- Girls who were quitting loved hockey less than those who didn't. They reported consistently lower ratings on questions such as "my teammates respect me" and "I feel like part of the team" and "I got a fair amount of playing time".

Conclusion: Girls seem to enjoy hockey more when they play on a Girls' team. There was a high correlation between enjoyment of hockey and having friends on the team. Girls playing on Girls' teams were also less likely to quit playing hockey. Therefore, this survey suggests that the social aspects of hockey are very important to girls and perhaps more girls would stay in the sport if they were encouraged to play on a Girls' team.

Sometimes it's good to be King (Queen)!

Some people think that it is good for a player to be challenged by playing against bigger, faster, older players or BOYS. However, this approach is not always good for a players' development, whether it is a boy or a girl. Sometimes it is good to be one of the better players on the ice – sometimes it's good to be King or Queen!

Being confident having the puck on your stick can relate to the hockey saying that everyone should know – “Time and Space”. The more time and space you have, the more you can do with the puck – stick handle, pass or shoot. Being able to consistently do this grows confidence and memory skills that when time and space is compromised, the skater can make good decisions. If a skater never has the chance to control the puck are their skills really being developed?

The following are thoughts and comments from two women hockey players. First is Angela Ruggiero. She played at Harvard and was the 2004 Patty Kazmaier Award winner. She is also a four time Olympian for Team USA.

- A key point for parents to understand is that at any time your daughter starts to become intimidated by the size and strength of the boys around her, it is time to switch to playing girls.
- There is naturally more camaraderie within a girls' team. If your daughter's goals are to have fun, stay in shape, develop her skill in the girls' game and potentially get more ice time, then girls' hockey may be best for her.
- Take the example of a girl who plays 4th line on a boys' team. She may get to practice with the highly competitive boys in practice, but come game time may only get a few minutes on the ice. That same girl on a girls' team may get lots of ice time, skate a penalty kill or be on the power play. This gives her a better chance to develop her individual skills under game conditions than she would by playing limited time on a boys' team.
- Puck touches and ice time always equal a better hockey player.

Second is Kim McCullough. She played at Dartmouth graduating in 2002. She obtained a Master's Degree in Kinesiology from York University and studied motor control in elite hockey players. She is also the Director and Founder of Total Female Hockey (<http://totalfemalehockey.com/>).

- She started to play hockey at age 13 and immediately started playing on Girls' teams.
- The checking difference between boys and girls has a huge effect on the way girls develop as players. Although girls tend to be more physical when they come over from the boy's game, they also tend to play more of a “survival” game instead of a “skill” game.
- Survival game is in the context of they start to get rid of the puck more quickly in order to protect themselves. It takes time for them to realize they have more time to decide what to do with the puck. However, will they make a good decision?
- Excelling in the female game after growing up playing with boys can be a challenge. In order to make the transition from boy's to girl's hockey, the girls have to adapt their game to focus on showing off their speed and skill when they no longer have to worry about “survival”.
- The #1 weapon in girl's hockey is speed! Is speed emphasized or are they grinding it out in the corners?

Things to Consider

- In which atmosphere will your daughter thrive both athletically and socially, and as a result, have the most fun playing and practicing? Girls are social beings and need to have fun with their peers.
- Is your daughter a factor or difference maker on the Boys' team? Could she be on a Girls' team?
- Competitive level on Girls' teams is arguably almost equivalent to Boys' B level. Is your daughter playing on a B team or a C team?
- The social aspect of Girls' hockey is very important. Will your daughter be comfortable getting dressed in a separate locker room or public restroom?
- Being on a Girls' team can bring leadership and personal growth opportunities. Very few girls playing on a Boys' team get to be a Captain or leader on the team.
- What is the state of the Girls' team and program? How many girls are playing? If a few girls left to play boys, does it negatively impact the program or team? If there weren't enough girls left to form a team, would the remaining girls quit if they didn't want to play boys? How would this impact the "numbers" two to five years down the road and into high school? What's best for the program?
- What is your daughter's preference?

In summary: the decision to have your daughter play on a Boys' or Girls' hockey team is of personal choice and should be made with input from both the parents and the player. This document is meant to highlight the pros of playing on a Girls' team. There is obviously a lot of other information to consider (cost, distance to practice, coaching, etc.) when making this decision and the answer is not the same for every player. In which atmosphere will your daughter thrive both athletically and socially, and as a result, have the most fun playing and practicing? More importantly, what is your daughter's preference?

¹ Information compiled from Internet searches in September 2013 by Dave Hull with input and thoughts from several individuals involved in boys' and girls' hockey in Appleton and Green Bay.

² Information advocating the participation on a boys' team can also be found by doing relevant Internet searches.