



Development and Retention: Moorhead Youth Hockey

Moorhead Youth Hockey is concerned about players quitting after one or two years of hockey and we are always looking at how we develop these young players. We also want to give all of our players an opportunity to develop their skills as they get older. In our association the Hockey Committee works each year on how we can retain and increase numbers and develop them into successful hockey players.

Our primary job is to develop the numbers we have. We study the projected registration numbers in the spring of the year and try to develop our programs so that they will benefit those numbers.

We look at the youngest group (rookies) and try to divide them into groups of equal ability so they don't get discouraged with more experienced players. They compete throughout the season and as they improve they can move up to the next level.

As parents are watching the practices and progress of their sons or daughters they form opinions about the sport and decide if this sport is right for their child. By keeping the players in the proper levels so that each player can have success convinces the parents to encourage their kids to come back each year.

For our younger players we make sure the practice times are consistent each week and throughout the season. Car pooling can be arranged in November and stays the same though out the season. The games for the rookies (4-6 yr olds) are always on Sunday late afternoons enabling the parents to enjoy the weekends with other functions knowing weeks in advance when they play.

We do the same with our Mite program, practicing every Tuesday and Friday evening. The times for each team are always within the same 5 pm to 7 pm time frame. The players are boxed on teams and they practice with 2 teams on the ice. Practices on Tuesdays are all skill related drills, and the practices on Fridays lean more toward team concepts. The mites will play games late Sunday afternoon and a occasional Saturday morning game. Games are all cross-ice with a full ice game two times per month. Our mites never travel.

Our squirt program is similar to our mite program. Practices are Mondays and Thursdays. On Mondays we work on skills only with a lot of station work. Thursdays we have two teams on the ice working on team concepts. These teams are not travel

teams, but instead they are in-house teams. These teams practice every week at the same time slots (5-7pm) and play games Saturday morning and Sunday late afternoon.

Consistent times for practices and games of players between the ages of 5-10 we believe helps to keep our retention numbers at a high level each year. It is a plus for parents who have several players in sports. They always know when hockey practices and in-house games are and it doesn't become a chore to get them there.

Our numbers in our in-house program are 100+ rookies, 90+ mites, and 90 squirts. This includes girls.

Squirt travel is limited to about 20 games. Because of our priority to in-house, our squirt travel teams receive only 1 practice per week if ice is available. We do not have tryouts for squirts but try to group them into Squirt A,B,C. My personnel opinion on labeling squirts at such a young age is that it promotes lower retention numbers. These players develop at different times so why label them and put false ideas in parent's heads which promotes the B-C parents into seeking another sport. Parents are spending money and time when they travel but they can get the same results with a good in-house program and spend half the time and very little money.

Our Peewee and Bantam travel teams play around 30-35 games per year up to Regions. All games are played on weekends with no weekday games. Practices are on weekdays either early morning or after in-house practices. We try to be consistent with practice times but it is very difficult with coach availability. We try to have 3 or 4 practices per week with 2 games.

We hope in the future to eliminate game counts or shorten the roster numbers so players get more ice time during a game. Maybe have two 'A' teams with 13 players each, and the same with "B" teams.

We also conduct an in season dryland program for squirts to bantams. Squirts participate once per week to work on various dryland exercises for about 30 minutes. Peewee and Bantams go twice a week with 45 minutes sessions. Weight lifting is not included with this dryland.

During the off-season the players can enroll in a 12 week off-season program. Some weight lifting is introduced to the older players. Otherwise, the program consists on resistant training, balancing, agility, and various stick-handling drills.

Players are encouraged to play other sports and we do not encourage playing AAA hockey with games every weekend.

Dennis Bushy, Moorhead Youth Hockey Association

