



CROSS-ICE HOCKEY AND SMALL AREA GAMES



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Cross-ice hockey or Small-area games, simply defined are technical and game-like competitive drills that use a playing surface that has been reduced in size and allows players to practice their hockey skills.

Small-area hockey actually has been around for as long as the game has been played. When players played on a pond did they use an ice surface 60 metres x 30 metres? No, they played in a small area that developed and sharpen their skills without the rules of off-sides, icing, penalties, face-offs, etc. Somehow coaches have moved away from this idea of practicing and playing in an environment with little control or structure, to one with greater control.

Many of the greatest hockey players to ever play the game will attribute their success to growing up playing on the ponds and not in highly controlled practices!

When the playing surface is reduced in size, young players are being correctly prepared for the speed and quickness they will encounter as they grow older. Can you imagine a child eight and under playing basketball using a ten foot basket? Cross-ice develops a positive environment, increases puck handling, and teaches puck protection by forcing players to play in smaller, confined areas.

Practice

For practicing it means that more players are on the ice but the group sizes are smaller. With more players on the ice it reduces the costs of the individual player for practicing.

This increases the ice usage and the efficiency of the practice by increasing the activity level of the individual player during the practice as their involvement time grows. Time spent waiting in line for the next chance to go is greatly reduced.

Players have more time with the puck for puck handling, passing and shooting. Drills are designed to focus on multiple skills and situations, increasing puck touches and situational repetition. On top of this the goalkeepers are more involved in the drills and get more shots to stop.

Practicing cross-ice and in small area's this is beneficial for players of all ages and levels and they have fun.

Play

The key playing benefits of cross ice are that it promotes creativity, creates an environment for self-learning hockey, increased player participation, speeds up the learning process, improves decision making skills so the player reads and acts quicker, maximizes skill learning and development, increases tempo, creates a positive environment and a passion to play.

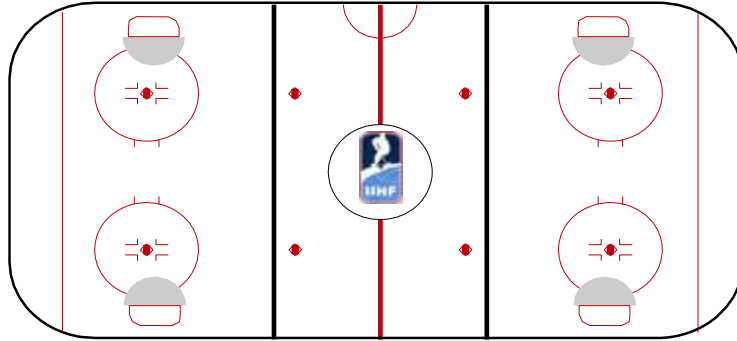
In small area games, players control the puck in tight situations and will typically have more shots on goal than in any normal drills – all while competing at game pace and having fun! This is a more competitive practice environment and players develop game strategies to make better decisions. Finally it reduces the need for traditional conditioning drills.

Many countries and National Associations have now included cross-ice hockey into league play at the Under 10 age group. At any level of play, an average player may only have control of the puck for a few seconds during the course of a game. In a small area game, that same player may have over a minute of puck-possession time over 6-7 shifts in one 10 minute game. One cross-ice game can have the development benefits of 10 -12 full ice games because of the closeness of the players to the puck and constant action.



Advantages of Cross-Ice Practicing and Playing

The IIHF Learn To Play Program is based on a model of practicing and playing hockey across the width of the ice surface, instead of along the full length of the ice surface. This cross-ice practicing and playing model has been used in many of the leading hockey nations in the world for a number of years and has stood the test of time. It has been shown that children who begin their ice hockey training in this environment have an outstanding hockey experience.



Parents may ask the question “Why should my child play cross-ice, what will they learn?” and say “I want my child playing on full-ice like the professionals do” That is the point, children are not adults, they see the world differently and learn differently to adults.

Let's think about a child trying to skate with a puck from one end of the rink to the other.

- How long will this take? How much energy will this require?

In which situation will the child be more involved in a game?

- In the close space of the smaller cross-ice surface or the wide-open area of the full-ice surface?

A study of hockey games played on the full-ice surface by George Kingston found:

- In a sixty minute running time hockey game between 6-8 year old children, the average player had possession of the puck for 20.7 seconds
- Top professional players were also timed and no player exceeded 85 seconds of puck possession time
- Youth players had an average of less than 0.5 shots per game and professional players only 1.5 shots
- In a sixty-minute children's game the actual playing time of the game was 20 minutes and 38 seconds
- Individual players are on the ice every third or fourth shift resulting in even less ice time

The study concluded that:

- For young players in the "full-ice game model" of development, the youngest players would require between 180 games to have 60 minutes of actual puck possession time to execute their stick handling, passing, pass receiving and shooting skills
- Professional players would require 60 games to ensure 60 minutes of puck control skill development
- Many youth players never touched the puck in the game

Practicing

- Children have more energy with which they can improve their skills when they are skating 30 meters across the ice surface instead of 60-meter length of the ice surface
- Group sizes become smaller this means learning and teaching become more effective
- Drills designed according to the varying skill levels of players within the group are easier to organize
- More puck contact resulting in improved puck control skills.
- More repetition/frequency in drills in one ice session.
- Decision-making skills are enhanced,
- More decisions must be made more frequently at a higher tempo.

Playing

- Increased puck possession time for each player.
- Individual technical skills develop more quickly.
- More ice time for each player.
- Children remain active between their shifts with various activities in the neutral zone.
- Each player's activity increases greatly.
- Scoring skills are enhanced since the players have more shooting opportunities
- The goalkeeper's reading of the game and reaction to changing game situations becomes more effective.
- More repetition for goalkeepers.
- The game is full of continuously changing situations.
- The speed in playing situations increases, which will require quicker mental and physical reactions by the players
- Due to increased tempo, all of the team members take part in solving the playing situations, which leads to a sharing of responsibilities between the players.
- Hockey sense, or understanding the principles of the game, is being developed at a young age.
- There are no unnecessary breaks in the game.



INTRODUCTION TO COACHING

General information

- More efficient use of ice time and space.
- The size of the rink is in proportion with the size of the players.
- The child sized goal nets are in proportion with the size of players.
- The middle zone is available for other purposes (player's bench, warm-up area, skill competition) while games are played in the end zones.
- The IIHF recommends that teams play with two or three units of four or five players and one goalkeeper which results in each player having more ice time.
- More ice time for practicing and playing is available to more teams within a single club.
- Many teams can practice together by sharing the ice surface

General Spirit of Participation and Fun

- More children get a chance to play ice hockey.
- More children will experience a feeling of success when playing hockey.
- The same exciting and fun environment as a full-ice game is created.
- Both more and less gifted children will benefit from close/tight action on the ice.
- Children are excited and motivated to continue playing hockey.
- Hockey will be more appealing and rewarding to a wider range of children and their parents.