



Dollars and Development: "Should my child play for a summer showcase team?"

12/04/2013, 10:00am MST
By USAHockey.com

Q: Should my child play for a summer showcase team?

A: 'Tis the season when some parents and players begin discussing plans for summer hockey teams, all-star teams and showcase events. In some cases, players and families may have already committed to a coach or summer program, while others may be actively pursuing showcase teams for summer events. But the reality is that this free-agent frenzy for 10- and 11-year-old summer teams has cast aside the development model for the competition model, and done so to the detriment of these young players.

While it may feel like an honor to be selected for one of these summer teams, research into long-term athlete development and sport science shows that playing more 10U games at the expense of practice time actually *decreases* the hockey skills acquisition rate.

Players at the 10U age level are entering their Golden Window of Skill Acquisition, a time when they are especially receptive to skill training and can make major skill gains quickly. At this stage, children learn coordination and fine motor skills at an accelerate rate. It's the most critical stage for the acquisition of hockey skills. As a result, the primary objective of this stage in a child's development is individual skill enhancement, both overall sport skills and sport-specific skills. That objective isn't achieved efficiently through playing more regulation hockey games. Instead, development occurs in practice.

In a 10U game, the average player skates for 13 minutes, has the puck on his or her stick for 23 seconds, and shoots the puck once. *One* properly run station-based practice is equivalent to *11 games* in terms of skill development. Skills are mastered in *practice*, where players may have the puck on their stick for 20 minutes, shoot 100 pucks, and skate upwards of 35-40 minutes.

Tier I, junior, and college coaches look for skilled hockey players. They aren't concerned about what summer teams a player competed on or what trophies they accumulated at 10U. They want skilled hockey players who can make plays. They can tell if a player chose the competition model or the development model at 10U.

Parents must understand what's truly important for their son or daughter at this age. The body and brain are recording muscle memory patterns during this stage at a greater rate than any other period in their lives. Their brain increases its recording process as the amount of repetitions increase. It's imperative that parents select the proper training environment, one that provides quality, high-repetition training sessions focused on acquiring individual hockey skills. This is *not* attained by playing more games. It's the exact opposite.

So save the \$2,000-plus that's typically spent for a summer showcase event, an environment where the total number of shifts combined for all

games, total shots taken and puck touches is the equivalent of staying home and practicing *once* with a highly qualified, age-appropriate coach who understands the big picture of true player development.

Have a great summer!

More on Player Development



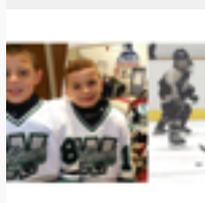
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