

# Russell Minor Hockey Association

## The 2011/2012 Initiation Hockey Program Handbook

Welcome to the Initiation program for RMHA for the 2011/2012 season. We are looking forward to a very positive and exciting year this season. This season, we will be hosting approximately 50 children in our Initiation Program (IP). This information letter should hopefully answer most of your frequently asked questions about the IP program and the Russell Minor Hockey Association (RMHA).

The Initiation program is made up of 5 and 6 year old hockey players. A player entering the program at age five would therefore spend two years in Initiation. The years that follow (7-8 year olds) would then be in our Novice program. In Novice, hockey players will be categorized according to their ability.

- I. Five year olds, who perhaps have \ been skating for a year and is accomplished, may find themselves on the ice with a six year old of similar skills (within the Initiation program).
- II. Six year old, who are first time skaters, may find themselves on a team with a five year old who is also a first time skater (within the initiation program).
- III. Novice aged 7 year old players, who is a first time skater (just learning), may find themselves on a team with a six year old (in the initiation program). This is unlikely, but under the Ottawa District Minor Hockey Association (ODMHA) guidelines, could happen.
- IV. Sensitivity will be shown with age differentiation and effort will be made to group both ability and age where possible.
- V. As a policy per the ODMHA, an Initiation aged hockey player will not be moved into the Novice division. In most cases were a player's ability excels, and if possible, hockey players with similar skills will be grouped and practice tempo and challenge will be increased appropriately.

The primary purpose of the program is to provide each child an equal opportunity to develop hockey skills in a cohesive and progressive manner, in an environment characterized by fun and personal and team reward. The focus remains on the player and on-ice experience

Skating does not appear to be a natural ability to any child. They master the skill over time and over many, many repeated exposures to learning. Many of the young accomplished skaters generally have been enrolled in learn to skate (CanSkate) or power skating programs prior to coming into the "world of hockey". Whether or not your child is in one group or another should not be perceived either positively or negatively in terms of rank. There is no rank; we simply wish to align every child with a program that most appropriately meets their developmental needs. If a child has previously been enrolled in skating programs and comes into Initiation as an accomplished skater, then we believe the program owes that child the opportunity to continue to grow developmentally while being challenged in a positive manner. The child who is a beginner skater also deserves the same opportunity to be challenged at different levels.

At the Initiation level we will have skaters who are putting on the skates for the first time, some who have good skating skills and some who are very good (for their age). Everyone will have paid the same fees for the program and every child is as equally important as the next. The RMHA is committed to this. Our goal is to provide every child with a positive experience and to have every parent feel they received great value. Balancing the needs of the various ability levels will be difficult and we expect a few "speed bumps" along the way. Realistic expectations and a bit of patience are greatly appreciated.

# Coaching Staff

All Initiation teams will have one “Head Coach”. All of our “Head Coaches” have received their Initiation coaching level training within an approved Hockey Canada clinic.

Our goal is to have at least two Assistant Coaches.

The goal is to maximize the attention provided to each hockey player. Although we cannot avoid “coaching the group,” whenever possible we want to provide individual instruction as well. We do want hockey players to be pulled aside so they receive proper instruction and have opportunity to learn it right the first time. Having said this, if your child is pulled aside please view it positively. If he or she is pulled aside a lot, please view it as getting extra value from the program. (Individual instruction is a good thing!). Coaches are also asked to recruit an Off-Ice Helper, a person who sits near the bench area and is on the ready to assist with equipment adjustments, water bottles, loose skates and the like. This will allow on-ice personnel to maintain the flow of the practice.

# Trainers

Trainers are mandated at the Initiation level for each team. Therefore, monitoring and addressing medical issues is a role shared by trainers, parents, coaches and helpers. The trainer role is, however, a “nice to have.” For each team, all coaches are encouraged to identify any individual who has trainer certification and request that the individual fulfill the role. On a limited and case by case basis, the RMHA will reimburse the cost of receiving trainer certification for coaches, helpers or parents.

Contact the Director of IP if you wish to pursue this avenue. (Trainers may be required for some tournaments so fill-ins may need to be recruited).

# Medical Forms

All players will be required to fill out a confidential medical form. As in the school system, it would be appreciated if snacks containing peanuts or nut products not be brought to the rink or dressing room. If your child has a food allergy or allergy of any kind, please inform the Head Coach directly, in addition to including the information on the medical form. If your child requires an EpiPen, please inform the Head Coach directly and ensure that a responsible member of the coaching staff is aware of what your EpiPen practice entails.

# Ice Times

Initiation ice times will start about the first week of October. Coaches will notify parents of exact times. All ice times will be at the Russell Arena. Over the course of the season each Initiation team will have approximately 50 hours of ice time. This figure should only be used as a guideline as actual ice time may vary depending on availability. Our goal is to have hockey players on the ice twice a week.

# Mouth Guards

Mouth guards are mandatory for Initiation. In addition to the protection of teeth, mouth guards play a role in the prevention of concussions. There appears to be debate or at least backroom discussion, about whether or not mouth guards assist in prevention of concussions for Initiation level skaters, however, they are mandated and playing on the safe side with the health and well being of our kids is a good strategy. Additionally, getting used to a mouth guard now prepares young hockey players for future years. Children without mouth guards, or ones which do not fit properly, will not be allowed on the ice.

Some children will have no problems with mouth guards while others will not want to wear them. Putting a bit of toothpaste on the mouth guard, in a flavor the child really likes, goes a long way. Do not expect your child to communicate coherently.

# Helmets, Cages and Neck Guards

Helmets cages and neck guards must be appropriately sized. All three are mandated. If helmets, cages and neck guards do not fit properly (or are not present) then skaters will not be allowed onto the ice.

## Skates

Other than the helmet (cage and mouth guard), the most important pieces of equipment are the skates. At the Initiation level there should be two primary considerations for skates: fit and support.

**Skate Fit:** Skates that are too large may certainly be around next year but risk hampering skating development and increase the probability of picking up bad habits. Skates that are too small may result in sore and cold feet. (Laces that are too tight will result in the same.)

Initiation aged skaters, and likely Novice as well, will have a difficult time telling you whether or not their toes are touching, slightly touching or not at all touching the toe cap of the skate. This information essential for good fit. To make this easier, and to ensure proper fit, try following these steps:

1. Unlace the boot and pull the tongue completely forward.
2. While seated and while wearing the socks that will be worn in practices (or games) have the hockey player insert their foot. It helps to put a towel or piece of carpet down to protect flooring from skate blades; socks should not be thick.
3. Ask the skater to firmly move the foot forward until the big toe touches the toe cap of the skate (just touching is what you want). With very young skaters, you may need to nudge the foot forward gently yourself.
4. Now, while keeping the toe touching the toe cap of the skate, and while still seated, have the skater lean forward so the knees bend.
5. There should now be a space between the back of the heel and the back of the skate. That space should be big enough to comfortably slide in a standard sized pencil or pen (the size of a Bic.) When foot size increases, swap the pencil method for an index finger. The pencil should “just touch” both the heel and the skate but it needs to slide in an out comfortably. If it’s too tight, the skate is too small. If too loose, the skate is too big.
6. Now, have the skater stand up, with toe still touching the toe cap of the skate, and confirm the heel gap is still OK. (The skater will need to lean forward a bit so you can access the gap.)
7. As one foot is likely bigger than the other, repeat the procedure for both feet.
8. Lace ‘em up and see how they feel.
9. Now, ask the child if the logo and look are OK and if they are expensive enough.

Most manufacturers’ size skates one size smaller than the equivalent shoe size (e.g., A size 2 skate is a size 3 shoe).

**Skate Support:** Regarding support, and especially with young skaters, the goal is to get “just the right amount.” Too much support results in a stiff boot that a young player will have great difficulty breaking in and the fit will be uncomfortable. Many of the high end children’s skates may very well have too much support for the child. Too little support will not allow development of proper stride as the player will be fighting to balance rather than stride. The following guidelines may help:

Put one skate into one hand so you can squeeze the ankles with your thumb and index finger and squeeze:

1. If you get no or very little flex, it’s too stiff.
2. If you can easily flex the skate or it feels very loose, there’s not enough support.
3. If you can flex the skate comfortably or with just a bit of effort, it’s likely just right.

Used skates are just fine. You don’t need to buy new to get proper support.

**Blade Sharpening:** New skates do not come sharpened, so get them done before first ice. There does seem to be differing views on how sharp a young skater's blades should be. Some sources say that because young skaters are lightweights, they need sharper skates. However, at a reputable coaching clinic, the word was that younger skaters should actually have skates that are not as sharp (but not dull).

A less sharp blade allows it to slide along the ice better and this makes learning how to do hockey stops easier. Additionally, those snow plough stops are easier and as such, encounters with the boards or end over ends might be reduced.

Frequency of sharpening depends on frequency of use, how aggressive the skater skates, and whether or not any nicks have been picked up from rough handling or backyard rinks. At the Initiation level, my practice has been to sharpen skates every four to five outings. To gauge sharpness, I run my thumb nail (carefully) across the blade (not down the length). If a bit of the nail gets shaved off, the blades are OK.

If not, I get them sharpened. You can also use a hand held ceramic stick to get a quick sharp edge. It does not hold as long as a sharpening but works great nonetheless (available at local shops).

Skates can be too sharp. If your child is able to do a hockey stop, or comes close to it, and you see that the slide is choppy and not smooth, the skates are likely too sharp. A gentle run of the blades on a piece of wood might do the trick.

**A Final Word on Skates:** At the end of the day, it's the feet that are in 'em that count.

## Stick Stuff

**Stick Length:** A very common handicap for young skaters is a stick that is too long. With skates on, the top of the stick should be between the collar bone and chin, but not at the chin. In street shoes, the top of the stick should be between the chin and tip of the nose. Make any errors on the short side as stick length affects how a player skates. Bad habits in stride and skating posture created from a stick that is too long can become very difficult to break.

**Youth, Junior, (Intermediate) and Senior Sticks:** Sticks come in three general sizes; youth, junior and senior. Some manufacturers, especially with composite sticks, have an intermediate size. Initiation skaters should consider a youth stick as diameter of the shaft is smaller and the blade is shorter, making it easier for small hands to handle. Depending on the skaters size a junior stick may also be used. By Novice age, most skaters will be into a junior stick.

**The Curve:** Beginning players are generally better off with a straight blade, or a very slight curve. Through Novice, curves in sticks should still be on the moderate side.

**Lefty or Righty?** When most young players pick up a stick they will naturally be either a left handed or right handed shot. However, some young players will literally shoot right for one practice and left for the other. If this is the case, go with a straight stick until the child decides.

**Kids and Composite Sticks:** No doubt, some kids will be on the ice with composite sticks. Arguably, until a child actually "has a shot" or demonstrates that they have they have proper shooting technique, they may not be able to sufficiently use the technology of composite materials. Pucks also have a tendency to "bounce" off of the blade more. Composite sticks are much more expensive than their wooden counterparts (can easily be more than five times as much – or much more). If a composite stick is purchased, the primary emphasis should still be on proper length and curve. Not sawing enough off of the shaft of the stick in order to ensure the player will still have use of the stick next year, would be a wrong move. Instead, be sure to purchase a wooden plug that can be inserted into the butt of the shaft to eventually lengthen the stick (available from most outlets selling composite sticks). Purchasing a composite stick with too great a curve, one that the child will eventually grow into, is also a mistake.

**The "Butt End... (of the stick!)** The butt end of the stick is that special, customized lump of tape at the top of the shaft. Most kids will show up very likely having what Mom or Dad liked most in their playing days. The knob should be such that little hands can still grasp the top of the shaft, as this will aid in stick handling and stick control. There is less of a concern at this young age for the knob to be big enough to prevent the stick from being lost in the heat of battle. In fact, some elite players shave the top section of

the shaft to give better feel. Initiation kids should have enough tape on the butt end to just prevent the shaft from entering the largest hole on the face mask – keeping in mind that the child still needs to be able to hold the stick. Black tape on the knob will wear onto the palm of hockey gloves and will eventually contribute to premature wearing out of the palm. Our skaters will grow out of the gloves before this ever happens, but using white tape here is still a good idea.

**Taping the Blade:** Tape on the blade of the stick helps cushion the puck. Even at this young age, kids will likely be able to notice the difference in handling a puck with and without tape on the blade. The tape provides a softer feel. There are as many ways to tape a blade as there are players. A good start might be simply to tape from just in front of the heel to just behind the toe (outer edge). White, black or any other color doesn't really matter. Some believe that black tape helps hide the puck from the goalie a bit better. However, this will be the least of concerns for any skater daring enough to get between the pipes to face down our young snipers.

## Hockey Games and Other Games

Traditional hockey games, with referees, off-sides and all of the other rules of hockey are not part of the Initiation program. Development is the focus, particularly the development of skating skills. This having been said, we know first hand that many young hockey players relish “the game.” So, near the end of many practices, all Initiation players will have opportunity to play hockey games. We leave it to the coaches to be creative here. There likely won't be standard shifts. There may be more than one puck on the ice. There may be many skaters on at once or numbers may be limited to help ensure players get a chance to actually get and skate with the puck. Other fun games will be used as well; things like freeze tag, soccer on skates, Superman dives, and asteroids. At times coaches may use discretion and not have a game in favor of further skill development. Most practices, however, should end with few minutes “fun time.”

## Fun Day

At least one Fun Day will be organized during the Christmas break time frame. This day will simulate a tournament with various teams playing each other with teams from outside Russell. Effort will be made to cater Fun Day formats to ability level. Extra fees will be required for participation as program fees do not cover this additional ice time and related costs.

## Name Bars

Some skaters will come to the rink with name bars on their jerseys (almost always the last name only).

They are available from local sports shops. Please ensure you put the name bar on in a manner that allows clean removal after the season is over as the jerseys must be returned.

## Videos, Books and Other Stuff

We have found the following to be some of the best for skating and shooting instruction. In both cases the material is very advanced but bits and pieces can be applied to young skaters. You can Google both to find retailers.

1. Laura Stamm's Power Skating (book and DVD)
2. Shooting and Scoring (DVD), Bobby Hull Jr's Instructional Video Series
3. For other sources you might want to go to the ODMHA web site or Hockey Canada.

# 24 Hour Rule

We have seen coaches make mistakes with kids. We have seen coaches do things very differently than we would have done them. We have been in the stands watching and wishing we were on the ice instructing. We have been frustrated at seeing kids standing in a line when they should be skating. We have come to the rink very early in the morning, our kids in tow, only to find that it was double-booked – and we didn't get the ice. We have seen kids being short-shifted.

We try to deal with these issues by remembering that coaches and most everyone else involved in minor hockey are volunteers. They are also human, as are the other players and other parents. In our experience, there are some bad apples but most hockey people are the best people we have encountered. If we feel a strong negative reaction to something, we try very hard to wait 24 hours before approaching the coach, or whoever it might be.

Parents may also be interested in participating in a Speak Out clinic, a Hockey Canada program designed to prevent harassment and abuse in hockey.

## Contact Information

Email us at: [Darren Pascoe](mailto:Darren.Pascoe)

We are here to help. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.

Remember, during the season, the Coaches and Director are here to help you. But, should an issue arise on your team, please discuss with the Coach of your team first. If the coach is not able to resolve the problem, or you are not satisfied with how your issue has been handled, you may then approach the Director of the IP program. Should we be unable to assist, we will go to the V.P. of House League, and finally the President of RMHA.

However, should you attempt to skip any of these levels; you will be directed back to the appropriate person. We always encourage the 24 hour rule. Hockey is a passionate sport, and as a parent, one can become quite passionate about their children. Please ensure you present any problems in a calm manor. We are all volunteers, and your problem will be more likely to be resolved to your liking if you approach it this way. Remember to ask yourself, "Is this how I would like to be approached?".

We wish you and your child a positive and fun experience in the Initiation program this year!