



# U15

## CANADIAN PLAYER PATHWAY

 **make  
hockey  
more**



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SECTION 1:  
**Introduction  
to U15 Hockey**

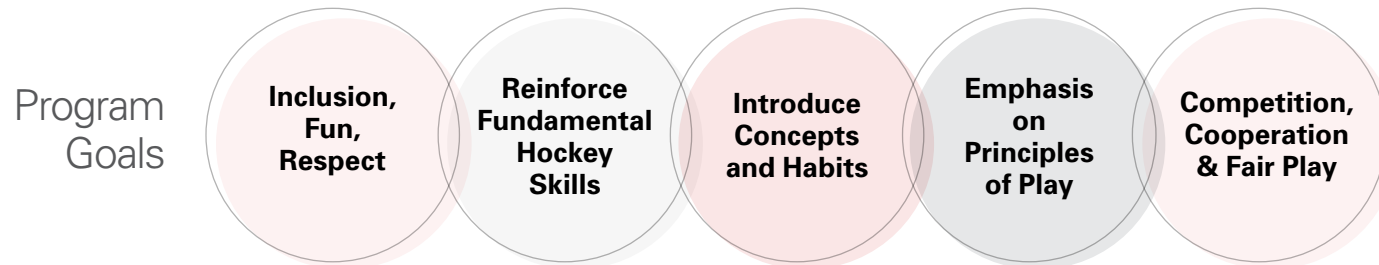


# Introduction

Development is at the core of U15 hockey, with the focus on refining skills so players will experience success in practices and games. Looking at how kids learn, and the number of repetitions of specific skills and situations that occur in practice versus a game, practice is where players have a chance to develop the most.

U15 hockey should be delivered through a progressive, learn-to-play teaching curriculum that is age-appropriate and skill-specific for 13-14-year-olds. It is a continuous opportunity for young players to develop and refine fundamental movement skills (skating, turning, acceleration), manipulation skills (shooting, puck control, passing) and overall motor skills (balance, coordination, agility) and checking skills (stick checks, angling, body contact) in a fun and safe environment, promoting skill development through self-confidence.

When players continue on a positive note, they enjoy the game and will go on to have fun playing hockey for many years.



Hockey Canada wants every Canadian youngster to have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from a program designed to meet their specific needs, one that ensures progressive skill development through well-delivered practice sessions and age-appropriate game play in an environment suited to their skill level.



SECTION 2:

# Rationale for Programming



# What U15 policies will benefit my child's experience?

## Player Evaluation/Selection

- No player evaluation/selection/tryouts during the off-season phase (March through August).
- No player evaluation/selection/tryouts prior to the first week of school, or during the first week if it starts the week after Labour Day.
- Where school starts prior to Labour Day, there must be two skates/practices (recreational) and four skates/practices (competitive) starting the week following Labour Day before player evaluation/selection/tryouts commence.

In situations where athletes are required to register for school or require billeting, the tryout/evaluation process as outlined above would not apply.

In situations where fall tryouts/evaluations are not possible, an initial spring ID/tryout camp may be held, providing roster spots are left open with final roster to be determined in September.

- Must offer two skates/practices (recreational) and four skates/practices (competitive) prior to evaluation/selection/tryouts.
- Must have a minimum of three evaluation/selection/tryout sessions.

Where teams are compiled for balanced rosters, formal tryouts are not required.

## Development Phase

- Must be a period of development time following player evaluation/selection/tryouts. (Recommend minimum of 10 –14 days from the time a team is selected until the regular season starts.)

## Playoffs

- Playoffs in U15 hockey must be tournament/short-term competition-style versus elimination rounds.
- If tournament-style playoffs cannot be accommodated, an alternative structure should be used that minimizes elimination time between initial elimination and declaring a champion. Teams must participate in regular season play until at least March 1.

CLICK TO VIEW A SAMPLE SEASONAL STRUCTURE

# Rationale for Programming

Dr. Stephen Norris has consulted with Hockey Canada in the areas of player development and performance programming for a number of years. He was one of the founding members and contributors to the 'Canadian Sport for Life' movement focusing on athlete/participant development. Dr. Norris contributed to Hockey Canada in the design of the **Long-Term Player Development Model** and Player Pathways.

In each area outlined below, rationale has been provided and has been supplemented by Dr. Norris.

Player evaluation/selection/tryouts cannot be scheduled prior to the start of the school year.

- Give LHAs and parents back the summer – season does not need to start early only to be finished in February (Start later/End later) Proper attention to the start of school year is important and stressful enough for players.
- Give LHAs a chance to get organized and begin planning.
- Because of varying growth spurts, especially at U15, we need to make sure to allow late developers to be at their best when they are evaluated.

*The notion of evaluations taking place weeks, if not months, in advance of the actual season for this age group makes very little sense due to the realities of child development during these periods.*

*The summer months are a time where youngsters not only consolidate previous experiences, but also advance their competency due to aspects such as recovery from earlier specificity, demonstrate adaptation of all previous experiences to new situations and activities over the summer months, and reveal growth and development opportunities that occur naturally – physical, psychological, cognitive, motor development, social, etc.*

*Everyone should understand that the return-to-school period (both the couple of weeks before, the week of and the 'wash-in period' until the student is settled back into the routine) is an extremely stressful period for the student.*

## Prep skates - Must have minimum of two (recreational) / four (competitive) practices / skill sessions prior to formal evaluations starting

- A player's first experience with hockey should not be a formal tryout – give all players the chance to get back on the ice in a more “player friendly” scenario.
- Give players more confidence going into tryouts.
- Helps to level the playing field as not all players have a chance to go to hockey schools or prep camps.
- Give LHAs a chance to run their own prep camp.
- Great opportunity to run Checking skills sessions for U15 players.

*There is a substantial benefit for children to have the opportunity to participate in two (recreational ) / four (competitive) ice sessions prior to formal selection or evaluation. Players feel more relaxed and are able to perform at a higher level, compared to being evaluated in their first time back on the ice. By providing these opportunities, players are placed in a situation where stress has been mitigated and they are able to showcase their ability.*

## Player evaluation/selection/tryouts must be a minimum of three formal sessions. Recommendation is one skills session, one small-area games session and one formal game.

- This is a key part of a player's hockey experience.
- Players need a fair chance to be evaluated – a standard process will show transparency and consistency.
- Will provide coaches with the basis of a development plan based on a solid and quantifiable evaluation.

*This methodology allows players to showcase their abilities over a longer period of time in three different aspects of competency. Different players will excel in the three different evaluation scenarios and collectively will provide coaches with a more complete snapshot of a player's overall abilities in order to make a more informed decision on selecting players for their teams. The different evaluation scenarios will also provide coaches with a better opportunity to develop a more comprehensive development plan for the individual player as well as the team overall.*



Development time following team selection and prior to the start of the regular season. (Recommend 10 - 14 days for competitive teams.)

- Imperative to give coaches the chance to develop and improve their players' skills prior to getting into organized games.
- Put focus on skills and player development, improves practice-to-game ratio - Skills before tactics, tactics before systems.
- Eliminate or reduce pressure to try and win right away and gives players time to learn individual aspects of the game.

*Professional and/or knowledgeable individuals wishing to provide positive developmental experiences for children or youth should reinforce the need for an instructional or practice component prior to the start of the season. With the implementation of this policy, we are moving forward to not only accept, but welcome development opportunities for the betterment of players.*

Playoffs must be tournament/short-term competition-style format versus elimination rounds.

- Give all teams the chance to play to same end point. (All players deserve the same chance to play to the end of the year.)
- More teams/more players playing longer into the season.
- Allow more rest and recovery within the season and the regular season schedule can be spread out.
- Greater opportunity for more players to participate in different activities in season.

*Teams often finish their regular season at the end of January or beginning of February to accommodate a playoff scenario that mimics what professional teams or semi-professional age-group development teams do.*

*It is important to remember that minor hockey is designed for children and youth who are developing and wanting to play hockey for as long as possible each season. After the first round of this playoff format (often the first week), 50% of the teams are no longer playing and with each successive round, 50% of the remaining teams get knocked out. This means that weeks before the end of the Canadian winter, we no longer have kids playing hockey, at least in terms of the original connection.*

*In an elimination-style playoff structure, teams look for tournaments and exhibition games to keep playing at least until the end of March. Unintentional consequences are increased costs to each participant due to travel, accommodation, food, entry fees, the associated costs of tournaments and even lost wages/salaries for parents. It is recommended that associations look at competition structures that keep their participants playing until as late in the season as possible.*

The Player Pathways are an overall philosophy that focuses on the delivery of the game by Hockey Canada Members with an emphasis on player development. Members have approved the philosophy and the implementation of the Player Pathways. However, should a Member due to regional differences need to modify a

required component of the U15 Player Pathway, it must ensure that the modification is done in a manner to maintain the overall philosophy of the Player Pathways. The Member will submit its adaptation and rationale as to how the change maintains the Player Pathway Philosophy to Hockey Canada.

SECTION 3:  
**Seasonal Structure**



The U15 level continues to differentiate between recreation and competitive programming. The timelines for each phase are meant to be maximums, but each phase can be shorter based on local logistics. The number of games and practices are also recommendations by Hockey Canada supported by the **Long-Term Player Development Model**.

# The Ideal Season

Young players have an opportunity to continue their development while having a positive and fun hockey experience. The ideal season does not conflict with the start of the school year, provides a fair evaluation/selection/tryout process and is structured to maximize development opportunities.

The U15 Player Pathway and corresponding coaching materials provide progressive and incremental skill development. By using the Hockey Canada Skills Manuals on the **Hockey Canada Network** and **Drill Hub**, coaches are provided with the framework for practice sessions that meet the needs of their players. The seasonal goals should correspond with the U15 Skills Matrix (Section 5) that outlines the skills players should be exposed to throughout the season.



# Annual Calendar & Seasonal Phases

## 1. Preparation/Evaluation Phase UP TO 4 WEEKS

- Prep Phase is an opportunity to get back on the ice and get prepared prior to tryouts so the first session is not a formal evaluation.
- Evaluating players in terms of skills, small-area game play and a formal game allows coaches to evaluate the different aspects player capabilities. This structure helps in providing players a better chance to show what they can do.

## 2. Development Phase UP TO 4 WEEKS

- Ideal practice-to-game ratio is 2:1 – two practices to one game played.
- Focus on skill development:
  - Fundamental movement skills: striding, turning, stopping
  - Manipulation skills: shooting, passing, puck control
  - Motor skills: agility, balance, coordination
- Fun and safe environment to promote self-confidence.

## 3. Regular Season Phase UP TO 24 WEEKS

- Recommended maximum of 46 games per season (exhibition, league, playoff/tournament).
- Recommended seasonal breaks:
  - Season should allow for two seasonal breaks (not including Christmas/long weekends).
  - Minimum five days without a scheduled game or mandatory practice.

## 4. Playoff/Tournament Phase UP TO 4 WEEKS

- Playoffs in U15 hockey must be tournament/short-term competition-style versus elimination rounds.
- If tournament-style playoffs cannot be accommodated, an alternative structure should be used that minimizes time between initial elimination and declaring a champion. Teams must participate in regular season play until at least March 1.

# U15 Seasonal Structure RECREATIONAL

PHASE	Prep/Evaluation Phase & Development Phase	Regular Season Phase	Playoff/Tournament Phase
DURATION	Up to <b>4 WEEKS</b> prior to the start of the Regular Season phase	Up to <b>24 WEEKS</b> after the completion of the Development phase	Up to <b>4 WEEKS</b> after the conclusion of the Regular Season phase
BALANCE	<b>15%</b> OF THE SEASON	<b>70%</b> OF THE SEASON	<b>15%</b> OF THE SEASON
VOLUME	UP TO <b>4</b> WEEKS	UP TO <b>24</b> WEEKS	UP TO <b>4</b> WEEKS
PRACTICES	<b>8</b> PRACTICE SESSIONS	<b>24</b> PRACTICE SESSIONS	<b>4</b> PRACTICE SESSIONS
GAMES	UP TO <b>8</b> GAMES	UP TO <b>24</b> GAMES	UP TO <b>12</b> GAMES
TOURNAMENTS	<b>1</b> TOURNAMENT	<b>1</b> TOURNAMENT	<b>2</b> TOURNAMENTS

CLICK TO [VIEW A SAMPLE SEASONAL STRUCTURE](#)

# U15 Seasonal Structure COMPETITIVE

PHASE	Prep/Evaluation Phase & Development Phase	Regular Season Phase	Playoff/Tournament Phase
DURATION	Up to <b>4 WEEKS</b> prior to the start of the Regular Season phase	Up to <b>24 WEEKS</b> after the completion of the Development phase	Up to <b>4 WEEKS</b> after the conclusion of the Regular Season phase
BALANCE	<b>15%</b> OF THE SEASON	<b>70%</b> OF THE SEASON	<b>15%</b> OF THE SEASON
VOLUME	UP TO <b>4</b> WEEKS	UP TO <b>24</b> WEEKS	UP TO <b>4</b> WEEKS
PRACTICES	UP TO <b>12</b> PRACTICE SESSIONS	UP TO <b>60</b> PRACTICE SESSIONS	<b>4</b> PRACTICE SESSIONS
GAMES	UP TO <b>6</b> GAMES	UP TO <b>28</b> GAMES	UP TO <b>16</b> GAMES
TOURNAMENTS	<b>1</b> TOURNAMENT	<b>1</b> TOURNAMENT	<b>2</b> TOURNAMENTS

CLICK TO [VIEW A SAMPLE SEASONAL STRUCTURE](#)



## SECTION 4:

# Recommendations



# Fair and Equal Ice Time

- Fair and equal ice time is designed to ensure that all players get the same opportunity to contribute to the outcome of games, regardless of skill or ability. A coach's responsibility is to develop all players to contribute. Shortening of the bench in an attempt to win games is not permitted. All players and goaltenders should receive fair and as close to equal as possible ice time.

## Recommendations

### Positional rotation:

- Recommend forwards play all three forward positions (LW-C-RW) and defence play both (LD and RD).
- All players get a chance to start the game and play in end-of-game situations.

### Goaltender rotation:

- Full-time goaltenders allowed.
- Goaltenders rotate for equal amount of playing time throughout the regular season and playoffs.
  - Goaltenders alternate games or split games as close to 50/50 as possible.
  - Each goaltender plays the final game in an equal number of tournaments.
  - The rotation schedule should be done in consultation with the goaltender and parents – share games or alternate playing full games.





# Focus on Skill Development

- Small-area games in practice / station-based practices / skill-focused drills.
- Only 20% of practice time should be spent on team play and strategy/systems with 80% of practice time spent on skills and tactics.
- Basic team play concepts such as defensive-zone positioning, forechecks, special teams, etc., can be introduced during the ice sessions prior to evaluation/selection/tryouts or after teams are selected.
- Forwards should rotate through the three forward positions (LW-C-RW) and defence rotate between (LD / RD) in the first half of the season and then may move to more consistent positions in the second half.

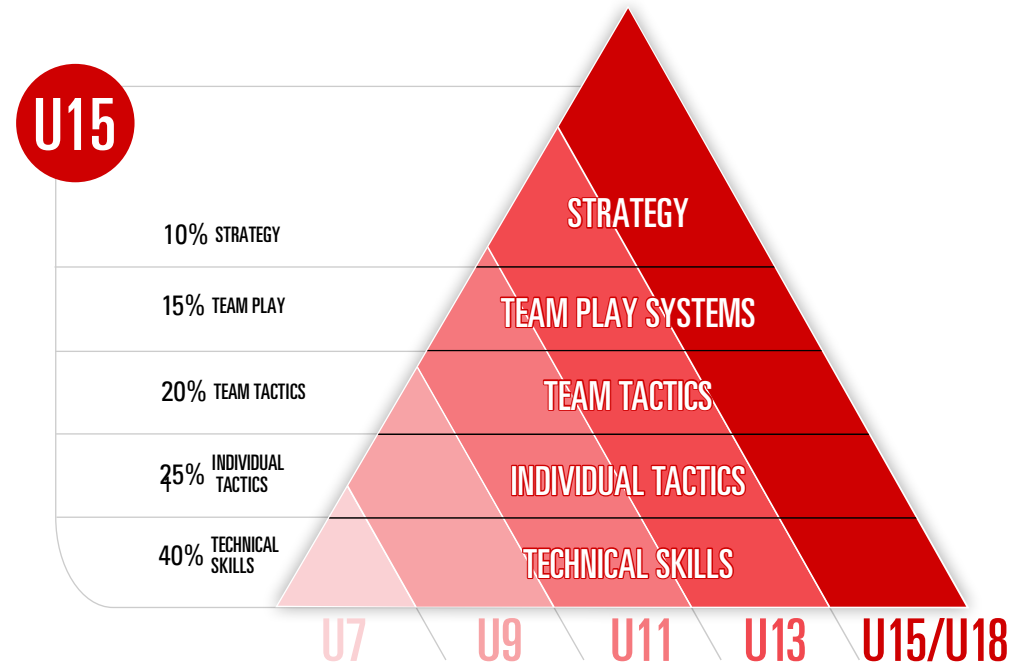
## STRATEGY

The selection of team play systems in order to impose upon the opposition, the style of play and tactics which will build on the strengths of the coach and team, and neutralize those of the opponent while at the same time taking advantage of the opponent's weaknesses.

For example: when opponent's defensive players have weak puck-handling skills, the strategy might be to shoot the puck in and use a 2-1-2 aggressive forechecking system.

## TEAM PLAY SYSTEM

A pattern of play in which the movement of all players is integrated in a coordinated fashion in order to accomplish an offensive or defensive objective (e.g. 2-1-2 forechecking system).



## TEAM TACTIC

A collective action of two or more players using technical skills and / or individual tactics in order to create an advantage or take away the advantage of an opponent (e.g. 3 vs 2).

## INDIVIDUAL TACTIC

Action by one player using one or a combination of technical skills in order to create an advantage or to take away the advantage of an opponent. A tactic may be classified as offensive or defensive (e.g. 1-on-1 offensive fake and driving to the net).

## TECHNICAL SKILLS

The fundamental skills that are required to play the game (e.g. skating, shooting, passing and checking).

SECTION 5:  
**Coach  
Requirements  
& Resources**



# Head coaches of U15 teams require:

1. Hockey University  
Online Community Coach training
2. NCCP Coach 2  
Coach Level (Recreational Stream)

OR

3. NCCP Development 1  
(Competitive Stream)
4. Checking Skills
5. Respect in Sport Activity Leader

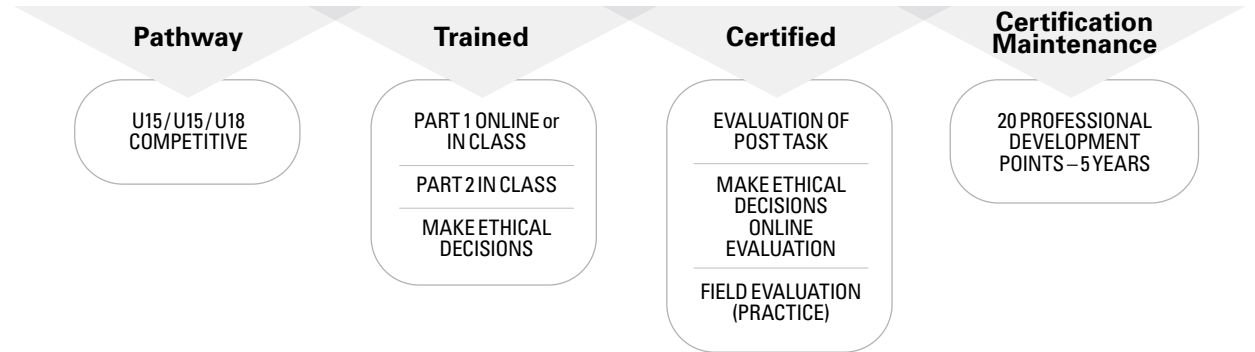


COMPETITION INTRODUCTION STREAM

## Development 1

All head coaches that coach teams in U15 or above at competitive levels, as determined by the Member, must be Development 1 “Certified” (other than those requiring High Performance 1).

### PATHWAY FOR DEVELOPMENT 1

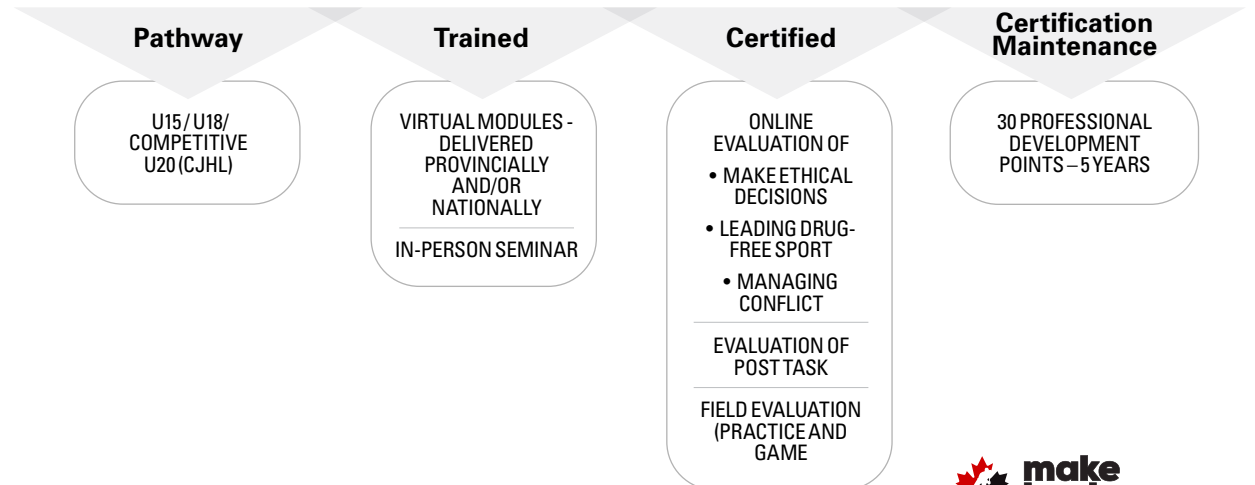


COMPETITION INTRODUCTION STREAM

## High Performance 1

All head coaches, that coach teams in U15 that compete in interprovincial or national championships or the highest level as determined by the Member, must be High Performance 1 “certified”. It is recommended that all assistant coaches be at minimum Development 1 trained.

### PATHWAY FOR DEVELOPMENT 1



# COACH 2 Overview

The NCCP Coach 2 – Coach Level clinic through the **National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP)** is a competency-based education and training method of learning for all new and recreational-level coaches, emphasizing basic skills and the importance of players developing confidence, self-esteem and a love for the game.

The clinic introduces player development and will teach coach knowledge, skills and attitudes in:

- Communicating effectively with athletes and parents.
- Supporting the athlete in a team environment.
- Supporting the athlete in the training environment.
- Supporting the athlete in a practice environment.
- Supporting the athlete in a game environment.

# DEVELOPMENT 1 Overview

The NCCP Development 1 Level clinic through the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP) is a competency-based education and training method of learning for all competition-level coaches, as determined by the Member, emphasizing skill development, individual and team tactics, as well as coaching soft skills which stresses the importance of players developing confidence, self-esteem and a love for the game.

The clinic introduces player development and will teach coach knowledge, skills and attitudes in:

- Transformational Coaching
- Team Building / Team Culture
- Safety and Risk Management / Maltreatment
- Long-Term Athlete Development
- Drill Design
- Developing Drill Progressions
- Practice Planning
- Developing Athletic Abilities
- Individual Skills and Tactics

# HIGH PERFORMANCE 1 Overview

HP1 is part of Hockey Canada's coach development program. The High Performance stream is for those who are coaching players in the U15 AAA, U18 AAA or U20 (CJHL) age categories and who have aspirations to coach at national and international competitions. Players in these age categories are 13 to 20 years old, and they have shown the skills needed to be considered emerging players. They have a solid grasp of the game's fundamentals and are starting to focus on individual and team tactics, and team systems.

The seminar/program introduces player development and will teach coach knowledge, skills and attitudes in:

- Analyzing performance
- Managing a program
- Designing a program
- Planning a practice
- Providing support to athletes in training
- Supporting the competitive experience

# Professional Development

## NCCP INSTRUCTIONAL CLINICS

Hockey Canada has created a series of instructional clinics in addition to the Coach Stream program. While the coaching clinics are more specific to supporting coaches in the team environment, the instructional clinics are specific to teaching skills in all areas of the game.

Members offer these clinics as a way of supporting and enhancing the ongoing development of coaches in:

- Skating
- Skills
- Developing Defence
- Shooting and Scoring
- Small-Area Games
- Checking Skills
- Goaltending



# Resources

Resources are available to support local hockey associations and coaches in the design and delivery of a hockey experience that meets the needs of 13-14-year-old players. Coaches should access both the Hockey Canada Network and Drill Hub to ensure they have up-to-date resources to support the U15 program. A variety of materials can also be downloaded [here](#).

## Hockey Canada Network

The **Hockey Canada Network** is an iOS and Android app that contains a wealth of information for coaches and instructors. The entire series of Hockey Canada Skills Manuals and the Skills of Gold instructional videos are available on the Network. It includes 32 lesson plans designed specifically for the U15 program, available to coaches and instructors. While there is a fee for full access, creating an account on the free version of the Network provides access to many U15 resources.

## Drill Hub

**Drill Hub** provides coaches of U15 players with access to all drills at no cost. Coaches can sign up to have free access to Hockey Canada's growing library of drills. Users can create their own practice plans to share electronically with players or assistant coaches.

## Maltreatment

Click [here](#) to view Hockey Canada's maltreatment policy.



# U15 Skills Matrix

The **Long-Term Player Development Model** places U15 hockey at the Learn to Train stage, with programming focused on fundamental skill development with an introduction to tactical development. The U15 skills matrix identifies the skills players must have the opportunity to develop through progressive and meaningful practice sessions.

## U15 Skills/ Concepts

LTPD STAGE  
LEARN TO TRAIN

Skating	Individual Offensive Play Puck Control	Individual Offensive Play Passing/Receiving	Individual Offensive Play Shooting	Team Play/Offensive Skills
Strong on feet	Control	Puck management skills	Being an option	Heads up
Stride	Carry with speed	Passing	Quick release	Puck protection
Edges	Protection/in a crowd	Look offs	In stride	Puck management
Transition and pivots	Driving to the net	Receive and control consistency	Change puck angle	Quick transition
Change of direction	Stick fakes	Pick up bad pass	Shot choice	Smart puck support principles (under pressure)
Acceleration/crossovers	Body fakes	First pass threat	Shot mentality	Entries
Stability	Dekes	Finding seams	Find shooting lane	Retrievals
Power	Moves in combination			Hinging
Agility	Creativity			Delays
Quick feet	Deception			Cycling
Evasive turns				Net drives
Escapes				Anticipation
Skate the game				
NZ speed				

Individual Defensive Skills	Team Play/Defensive Skills	Intangibles	Hockey Sense
Angling	Timing and support– spatial awareness	Dedication to being an elite athlete	Ability to make decisions that affect the play
Stick on puck	Situation gap control	Be in every battle	Ability to understand the tactics necessary to compete at this level
Defensive side	Read and react	Resiliency	Adaptability
Shot blocking	Communication	Work ethic	
Boxing out		Communication skills	
Fronting		Emotional control	
Controlled skating		Does “whatever it takes”	
Tracking			
Transition from defence to offence			

SECTION 6:

# Frequently Asked Questions



# Frequently Asked Questions

## 1. Are local hockey associations permitted to tier U15 teams, or should all teams be balanced?

Teams are permitted to be tiered to provide a grouping of skill that allows for meaningful competition. If there are multiple U15 teams, it is recommended the teams are balanced (i.e. if there are two U15 A teams in the same association, it is recommended these teams are balanced).

## 2. Are teams required to reach the maximum number of recommended games or practices?

Teams do not have to play or practice up to the maximum numbers, as outlined in the seasonal structure. Many local hockey associations have different ice allocations and facility availability, so schedules can be developed based on the availability up to the maximum number of recommended games or practices.

## 3. What should the content of the ice sessions be for the four development sessions prior to evaluation/selection/tryouts?

The sessions should be focused on the fundamental skills of skating, puck-handling, passing and shooting, along with small-area games to prepare players for the evaluation/selection/tryout process. Hockey Canada and its Members have developed four sample ice-session plans for local hockey associations to utilize. The goal is to provide players an opportunity to be on the ice and revisit these skills prior to evaluation/selection/tryouts.

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The Player Pathways are an overall philosophy that focuses on the delivery of the game by Hockey Canada Members with an emphasis on player development. Members have approved the philosophy and the implementation of the Player Pathways. However, should a Member due to regional differences need to modify a

## 4. Which drills should be used for evaluation/selection/tryouts?

The best drills are ones designed to provide evaluators/coaches with a good snapshot of a player's ability so they can be placed on teams with like-skilled players. The on-ice drills should be a combination of skating, puck-handling, small-area games and game play as part of a well-rounded process. Hockey Canada and its Members have developed sample evaluation ice-session plans for local hockey associations to utilize. The goal is to provide players a chance to experience a fair evaluation of their skills, competitive mindset and hockey sense.

## 5. Are seasonal breaks required?

Seasonal breaks are not mandatory but are recommended as a "good practice" for players to have a chance to re-charge, for coaches to attend professional development sessions and for families to engage in activities and not have to worry about missing scheduled hockey activities.

## 6. Is it mandatory for players to rotate positions?

It is not mandatory, but it is beneficial for players to play different positions to assist in developing their overall skill and hockey sense. At the U15 level there is no need for a player to only be a right winger or left defence; rotating positions will give all players a chance to experience the game from different positions and ultimately develop well-rounded players.

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required component of the U15 Player Pathway, it must ensure that the modification is done in a manner to maintain the overall philosophy of the Player Pathways. The Member will submit its adaptation and rationale as to how the change maintains the Player Pathway Philosophy to Hockey Canada.

## Canadian Development Model (CDM) Minor Task Team

Hockey Canada gratefully acknowledges the contributions of the following individuals:

**Nic Jansen** Chair, Hockey New Brunswick

**Connor Cameron** Hockey PEI

**Craig Tulk** Hockey Newfoundland & Labrador

**Phil McKee** Ontario Hockey Federation

**John Neville** Hockey Canada Board (past director)

**Corey McNabb** Hockey Canada

**Yves Archambault** Hockey Canada