



**HOCKEY SASKATCHEWAN**  
**UNDER-9 HALF-ICE**  
**INFORMATION BOOKLET**

**2022-2023**



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### REGULATIONS

All U9 games in Saskatchewan will be played Half-Ice hockey at the U9 age division for the entire season with the alterations to the game structure as outlined.

### BASIC RULES OF THE GAME

- 3-minute warmup.
- Officials will draw a dot in the middle of the game zone for all face-offs.
- Shifts are 2 minutes.
- A face-off will take place at the start of every shift.
- There are no icing or off-side calls.
- Score will be kept; however, goals and assists will NOT be recorded.
- Goalies may not be pulled at any time.
- Line matching must take place. The more advanced players from each team being matched against the more advanced players from the opposing team.

#### Continuous Play and Change of Possession:

As identified by Hockey Canada as a core element in U9, one of the keys to improving the flow of each game and reducing the stoppages is to create continuous play, particularly on change of possession. These basic rules apply:

- One coach from each team will assist in moving of bumpers/boards at the end of each shift.
- A face-off will take place at the start of every shift.
- There will be no stoppages in play during shifts; continuous play will be used. (Exception: injury)
- **Puck shot out of play:** Official blows whistle, defending team backs off and non-offending team gets possession.
- **Goalie freezes puck:** Official blows whistle, attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession.
- **Goal Scored:** Official blows whistle, attacking team backs off and defending team gets possession.

#### Penalties

The following guidelines apply to minor penalties during U9 Half-Ice games:

- Standard: Delayed penalty procedures are followed. (NOTE: goalie can't be pulled during delay)
- The Official calling the penalty blows the whistle, identifies the offending player, and penalty.
- Offending player is escorted to the player bench by the Official who called the penalty.
- The second Official gives possession to the non-offending team. (Offending team must back off)



- The offending player is eligible to return during the same shift if goal is scored by the non-offending team.

## SEASONAL STRUCTURE

### Season Start:

- *RECOMMENDED* - Mid-September/October

### Development Season:

- Eight-10 weeks, 16-20 practices. Of the 16-20 practices during the Development Season, Hockey Saskatchewan recommends that 8-10 practices are done with a certified skating instructor.
- The remaining 8-12 practices should have emphasis on individual skills.

### Number of Practices for Season:

- Forty-45 total, approximately 45-60 minutes each. This is to learn, develop and refine skills.

For a list of practice plan ideas, please visit: <https://www.hockeycanada.ca/en-ca/hockey-programs/drill-hub/under-9>

## REGULATIONS

**Total Games** - 40-45 games

**Start Date for Games:**

**Exhibition** - November 15<sup>th</sup>

**Tournaments** - December 1<sup>st</sup>

**League Games** - January 1<sup>st</sup>

**League Playoffs** - Must be tournament-style format over no more than two weekends.



### GAME FORMAT

Allow flexibility on the timing of the game, dependent on the amount of ice that is available:

- If a one-hour timeframe is available, use the model of two twenty-four (24) minute halves with two-minute shifts.
- If a ninety minute or two-hour timeframe is available, use the model of two thirty (30) minute halves or three twenty (20) minute periods all with two-minute shifts but stop the clock at the end of every two-minute shift.

### SCHEDULING

Minor Hockey Associations and leagues are strongly encouraged to schedule U9 Half-Ice games in succession whenever possible to allow for fluid transition between games. Ideally, this group of U9 Half-Ice games would also follow a group of U7 Cross-Ice games to limit the movement of rink dividers.

### PRACTICES

To maintain the concepts of Long Term Athlete Development and modified ice, practices at the U9 level **MUST** be on half-ice all year. This allows for the focus to be on skill development and competitive games in small, modified spaces rather than full-ice flow drills or team tactics.

### ROSTERS

Hockey Saskatchewan understands there are challenges in having consistent roster sizes across the province. It is recommended that, whenever possible, team rosters should consist of 10-12 skaters plus one (1) rotating goalie.

This provides the opportunity to increase ice time while utilizing a Skills Zone (Optional). Frequent water breaks may be given at any time to ensure a point of rest. However, this format will work for any size team! Hockey Saskatchewan encourages ALL skaters to be trying different positions.

### EQUIPMENT/SET-UP

Hockey Saskatchewan recommends that for the best possible results, two rink dividers are utilized in this format. However, only one rink divider may work as well.

#### **Full sized nets will be used.**

A minimum of two on-ice coaches per team are responsible for assisting in setting up the nets and rink dividers for each U9 Half-Ice game. In addition, they should assist in removing the rink dividers and the nets from the development zone immediately following the game. Trials have proven this only takes two (2) minutes before and after each game.

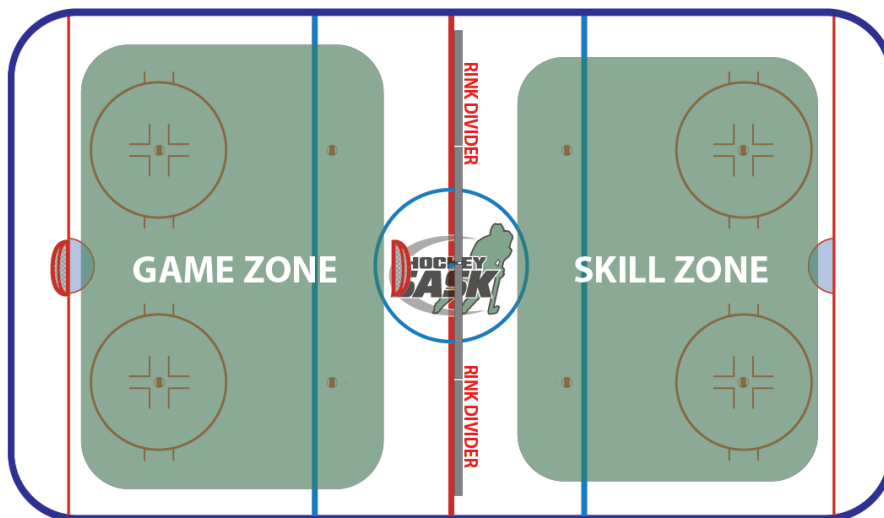
If there is another U9 Half-Ice game after their game, on-ice coaches should rotate and move the rink dividers into the middle section of the ice surface to allow flooding around the boards so the remainder of the ice surface can be flooded. Each Association and/or community can determine the specific protocol regarding the most efficient movement of equipment.

### HALF-ICE LAYOUT

In the Game Zone, one net is to be placed on the goal line (using the crease and markings) and the second net is to be placed just in front of the center ice red line using the face-off dot as a guide for placement.

The Skills Zone is **OPTIONAL**. When being used, it may consist of stations of small area games, skating, passing, puck handling and shooting.

One set of rink dividers can be placed across the entire width of the ice along the redline. This can easily be accomplished if using the border patrol rink dividers, by simply removing one of the eight sections in each set and centering across the ice surface accordingly. This will leave approximately 3-4 feet of space on each side of the ice surface.





### SKILLS ZONE (OPTIONAL)

The purpose of the Skills Zone is to maximize ice usage, while providing additional ice time and development opportunities for players. On-ice coaches (1 from each team) will also be able to coach and encourage players, providing additional teaching and instructional opportunities.

#### **THIS ZONE IS OPTIONAL BUT HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.**

The Skills Zone will consist of a cross-ice section of the ice that extends from the end boards to the nearest blue line, opposite that of the Half-Ice Zone. Players in the Skills Zone will be working on developing their skating, passing and puck skills. Small area games may also be played in the Skills Zone.

- One coach from each team is required to be on the ice to oversee the Skills Zone.
- On-ice coaches should also assist Officials in moving the half-ice divider back into its proper position if moved significantly during the Half-Ice game.
- The number of players in the Skills Zone will vary, depending on each team's numbers.

Despite being from different "teams," on-ice coaches should work together to provide the maximum benefit for all players, while also learning from each other. Each team is encouraged to rotate coaches that will go on the ice from game to game.

### ON-ICE OFFICIALS

The Half-Ice game may be run by two (2) Hockey Saskatchewan certified officials who will be responsible for face-offs, goal determination, penalties, etc. while working on fundamentals such as skating, positioning, and communication. This will assist young officials in building confidence and experience, reacting "with" the play rather than "to" it, while creating a foundation they can build from. Hockey Saskatchewan will include applicable officials' Half-Ice protocol at all Level 1 officiating clinics, and it will also be circulated to all Minor Hockey Associations. Officials will continue to learn about offside, icing, and other full-ice rules at their clinics.

### ROTATION OF PLAYERS

A crucial component to the success of the U9 Half-Ice structure is the organized rotation of players between shifts. Coaches from each team must meet prior to entering the ice surface to discuss the following: number of players on each team and therefore the number to be used during the game portion; line matching; if the Skills Zone is going to be used; which side will players enter and leave the game area; etc.

At the beginning of each game/period, coaches will assign 5 players (depending on the number of total players each team has) for the Half-Ice game, and the remaining players in the Skills Zone or players bench. Once the buzzer sounds, a new group of players from the Skills Zone or players bench will go into the Game Zone.



### LINE MATCHING

Line matching is having the same caliber of players playing against each other at the same time and must be employed.

### GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT FAQ'S

***1. Does my son/daughter regress by having to play Half-Ice again at 8 years old?***

No, 8-year-old players need to have this significant portion of the season played Half-Ice to continue to reach their hockey potential. All the benefits of development in Half-Ice hockey are very important for an 8-year-old player.

***2. Does my "advanced" player regress by having to play Half-Ice at 7 or 8 years old?***

No, advanced players benefit even more by playing Half-Ice. All players benefit from increased puck touches, scoring chances, quick transitions, read & react situations, puck support, passing plays in Half-Ice hockey. However, research shows that advanced players benefit twice as much as the average player.

***3. What about the offside and icings learned in the second half of the 7-year-old season?***

Learning and mastering rules of the game are not important for a 7 or 8-year-old player. Growth and development principles tell us that this age is very important to maximize their long-term development potential, so try not to focus on game rules during this part of the season. Although we all respect the rules of the game, these specific rules can be learned or remembered when they progress to U11.

***4. Some 8-year-old players are very big; what about incidental contact and collisions?***

Incidental contact and collisions will always be part of the game and are unavoidable anytime you have players around the puck; however, the reduction in the playing area from full-ice to Half-Ice will force players to accelerate their thought process and reaction times. It should also be noted that Junior/NHL players, all of whom are much larger than U9 players, spend most of their time in either the defensive or offensive zones (smaller areas than that of our Half-Ice zone), so to think 7 & 8-year-old player development is going to be stunted rather than accelerated by playing on a reduced ice surface is inaccurate.

***5. With the reduction in ice surface, won't this have a negative impact on skating development?***

Quite the opposite. Hockey is no longer a linear game and skating is much more than simply moving in a straight line. The reduction of the ice surface will again help to develop players' complete skating skills which include stops and starts, transitions, turning, pivots, agility, edge work and balance. Good skaters will always be good skaters but playing in a Half-Ice concept will assist in the development of every player's skating acumen rather than primarily relying on or limiting their skating arsenal to full





acceleration. In addition, a study conducted by Hockey Alberta found that young players can reach top speeds in a distance less than half of the ice. Therefore, we are confident that Half-Ice games will improve rather than handicap players' skating skills.

**6. *Won't there be increased whistles with the reduction of the ice surface, and pucks shot over the divider(s)?***

With the removal of offsides and icings, our research has shown that there is a decrease in stoppages of play. The result is more continuous, competitive play for all participants during every shift. Trials have shown that the number of pucks shot over the divider(s) is very limited.

### HALF-ICE VIEWS FROM JASON STRUDWICK

*Written by former NHL defenseman Jason Strudwick*

#### **DEVELOPMENT**

The goal of sharing my thoughts is not to change your mind if you do not like the new way U9 is being played. By sharing my thoughts, I simply want to prepare those who are going into the program next Fall and help those who are currently in it. It was new for everyone this year and I wish I knew now what I did not know or understood in September.

I was the head coach of one team and the assistant with another for first year U9. We were lucky to have a lot of committed parents who became coaches, managers, and volunteers. That makes a huge difference! If your child is involved in any sport and you are not volunteering, take a second to see if you can help in some way. When it falls on one person or a group, it can burn them out and make them rethink their commitment.

So where to start with the first year of Half-Ice U9 hockey as a coach/parent? The format of playing Half-Ice games makes it easy to figure out. There were no winners and losers in the games. Did the kids and parents keep score in their heads? Sure. But there was no website that said which team was winning or losing.

With no winners or losers, I think this should have changed the year-long plan for the coaches. In the past with full-ice games at U9, it was understood that spending time on a breakout or forecheck was needed so there was some order to a game. Learning icing and offside was very important as those rules were called and enforced. Teaching a 7-year-old these concepts could be tricky and very time-consuming. Without the need to address those areas, coaches could change their priorities.

The coaches could now focus 100% on player development, though still slowly introducing the kids to all of the different [hockey penalties](#).



This concept of working on skill sets took the pressure of winning away from the coaches and it freed them up to really go after developing players, which is where I believe the focus should be at this age. Now, the coach shouldn't wonder if he is doing the right things for his team to win. He can focus solely on if he is doing the right things to make the players improve. Then the games become the stage for the players to show off their improving skill sets.

The puck touches were great on the half-ice. Shots are frequent and passing is needed. It is difficult to really grab the puck and go through a whole team on half-ice. Players are always around you and able to close the space on you faster than on full ice. This allows the coaches a great opportunity to preach passing. It is not easy, but when you see four passes in a row, it's so beautiful you almost start to cry!

At the end of the day, hockey is about having fun. That is why kids play it and we coach it. We cannot forget about that. Every coach can have their own way to create fun. You need to find yours. I do believe players have fun when they know they are improving and touching the puck in games. Focus on those skills and the smiles will come.

### **PRACTICE PLANNING**

So, where to start with a Half-Ice practice plan?

We had more practices than games. I love that ratio. As a coach, I believe the practices are for the coach and the games are for the players. If we can have organized and well-thought-out practice plans, the players will have success in games. Not the other way around.

I believe there should be a practice template. As coaches, we don't need to re-invent the wheel from practice to practice and come up with new drills all the time. First off, coming up with all new drills for all 30 practices would be impossible. The group of coaches would spend a lot of time teaching the drills. That wasted time means less time to do the drills for the players. The players also need to figure out the drill before they can work on the skill the drill is attempting to improve.

To start the season, all the drills and practice plans will be new to your team. After a while, everyone will get comfortable with the drills, and they will get to understand how you want to run the practice. Coaches don't feel guilty about using the same practice plan for back-to-back practices. The players will get a lot more out of the second skate knowing what to expect and the coaches can now spend more time coaching the skills involved in your drills rather than coaching the drill. As your team gets used to your drills, you can mix in some previous drills in each practice so the players can work on their basic skills. Then introduce new drills with new skills required, one or two at a time, to keep challenging your players. There should be a structure to the practice that the kids come to expect. I believe the players like the structure and thrive under it. Ask a teacher — they are the ones who clued me in. Here is an example of what each practice can look like. The drills can vary from practice to practice, but the template stays the same.



### EXAMPLE

10 mins...small area game

10 mins...skating drills

8 mins...passing drills

Break into four stations. Each station is 7 mins:

a - skating station

b - stick-handling station

c - passing station

d - puck race station

Any remaining time becomes a puck pirate game.

At this U9 level, I would concentrate on skating and passing. I know, I don't have shooting in there. I didn't spend any time teaching shooting once this season. The kids shoot a ton of pucks when they get on the ice. It is the one skill you don't need to ask them to do. Have you ever seen a kid jump on the ice with pucks around and decide to instead work on their tight turns or Mohawk turns?

I believe if a player can skate and the coaches put a strong emphasis on coaching the skill of passing and preaching for players to pass in games, they will get their chance to shoot on net. If you spend a lot of time teaching shooting and not enough on skating and passing, they will never get to use that shot. Every drill I come up with finishes with a shot on goal. That gets the kids excited. I don't care about the shot. I care about the four tight turns and two passes they do before they get to take the shot. They work on the skills you want and they still get their shot. Everyone wins!

### SKILLS LICENSEES

If your Minor Hockey Association is interested in having one of our Skill Licensees out to work with your players on skating and skill development, please see the link below.

<https://hockeysask.ca/coaches/skills-licensees>

## CANPOWER SKATING INSTRUCTORS

If your Minor Hockey Association is interested in having one of our certified CanPower skating instructors out to work with your players, below is a list of ones that are endorsed from Hockey Saskatchewan. Please contact Matt Miller ([mattm@hockeysask.ca](mailto:mattm@hockeysask.ca)) if you are interested in bringing out a CanPower Instructor to your Minor Hockey Association.

## CONCLUSION

Hockey Saskatchewan sincerely appreciates the efforts the thousands of volunteers across the province who dedicate their valuable time to our great game.

We understand that change can sometimes be difficult; however, we are confident that these modifications will benefit all U9 players as they grow and develop.

This information has been created to assist all volunteers in the consistent delivery of the new U9 Half-Ice format, and ultimately ensure that we work together to provide a positive hockey experience for our players in a safe, sportsmanlike environment.

