

**Winchester Youth Hockey's
Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

(Note: this was first written in 2006 and updated in 2010)

1. Can the hockey season be shortened?

Winchester Youth Hockey's Boys/Open Travel teams currently play in a for-profit league (The Valley League), which either owns rinks (Malden, Lawrence and Haverhill) or has long term lease agreements that require ice purchases over a 7-8 month period (Merrimack, Woburn, Burlington). The league works with the rinks to ensure the profitability of both the rinks and the leagues. Since we do not participate in the decision-making of these leagues and we do not own a rink we really can't control the length of the season.

There are only two ways that we know of to reduce the length of the season: (1) move to an in-house program and (2) move to a non-for-profit league such as the now-defunct Middlesex League where we participated in the league decision-making.

At this time the Board of Directors does not view either of these options as viable. We do not have the ice to accommodate an extensive in-house program, nor do we think that that is in the best interest of all the children.

In short, the length of our season is very much dictated by the league that we choose to play in, where WYH does not have any control over the scheduling of games. In situations where we control the scheduling (Learn to Play Hockey, InHouse /Recreational), we have been more successful in reducing the overall length of the season.

2. How does the placement process work and why aren't outside evaluators used?

The WYH Placement Process begins in late February, when the President and ACE Coordinator present a slate of "Placement Coordinators" (PC) to the Board of Directors for their approval. A PC is named for each age classification that will participate in our Placement sessions (namely, Mites, Squirts, Pee Wees, Bantams, Girls and Midgets (if needed)). Simultaneous with this process, the ACE Coordinator is also soliciting applications from all those who wish to be considered for coaching positions for the following season. Once the Placement Process is complete, and team assignments are finalized, the ACE Coordinator and President will review the applicants and choose the best candidates for each coaching position. The ACE Coordinator and President will then present a slate of head coaches to the Board of Directors for approval.

The Placement Coordinator at each level "runs" the placement process once Placements begin. He or she will pick a team of 5-8 on-ice evaluators. In most cases, the evaluators are the current head coaches for each age classification and the current head coaches for the age classification one below. For example, the Evaluation Team for Pee Wees would

include all the current Head Pee Wee Coaches and the current Head Squirt Coaches. While we hope to have all Head Coaches available for all the Placement sessions, we understand that our volunteers sometimes will have family or work conflicts that prevent their attendance. In this case, we will ask for their verbal input and we will also ask that an assistant to that particular Head Coach attend in his/her absence. The President and ACE Coordinator may also be on the ice for placements (if they are not already part of the evaluation team) to monitor the process. Their sole role (if they are not part of the evaluation team) would be to ensure that the process is being adhered to. If it becomes necessary to add additional Evaluators to round out a team of 5-8, the Placement Coordinator has the authority to select suitable Evaluators. For instance, if there are only 2 Bantam and 2 Pee Wee teams, the Bantam Placement Coordinator has the authority to choose 1- 4 additional evaluators.

The Placement Coordinator designs the placement sessions based on the age bracket. For example, Bantams may have a much higher percentage of scrimmage time versus Mites. At Mites you may be looking more for certain skating skills where at Bantams you want to see who can play the game.

Through “skill drills” and “scrimmages”, the children are evaluated based on: skating (includes both technical ability and speed/quickness), shooting, puck handling, passing and “game sense”. For Pee Wees and Bantams, the ability to play the game with body contact is also factored in. Each member of the Evaluation Team is required to rate every player on the ice each session. After each placement session, the PC will organize a meeting of the Evaluation Team (typically in a locker room), for the purpose of developing a consensus rating on every child. If we are picking three teams at a given age level, the evaluation team will place the children into one of five buckets after each session:

- A
- A/B Bubble
- B
- B/C Bubble
- C

The discussion to arrive at a consensus rating for each player is based on two key pieces of input: 1) the independent ratings of each member of the Evaluation Team for every child on the ice and 2) the input from any child’s coach from the current or past seasons. The PC will poll every evaluator for their rating on every child and a consensus rating will be agreed upon. It is at this time that a current or past coach of a child can also offer his/her insight as to the performance of that child over a longer period of time, in a team context. (Every child who played the previous season for WYH will have at least one coach on the Evaluation Team that has coached the child in the past.)

A spreadsheet is prepared for each subsequent placement that shows the current ranking of each player. Over the course of the placement process children may move in both directions. Some players will move several positions (e.g., from C to B/C Bubble to B).

After the final on-ice session the team once again assigns the children to each of the five buckets. Generally (although this is not always true), the number of children in “bubble groups” drops significantly from the first session.

Regarding the final on-ice Placement Session, it should be noted that most of the final night of Placements consists of scrimmaging among the players. **GIVEN THE NUMBER OF PLAYERS INVOLVED AT PLACEMENTS, EQUAL ICE TIME DURING THE FINAL SCRIMMAGE SHOULD NOT BE EXPECTED FOR ALL PLAYERS.** Given that it is the final opportunity to look at players on-ice, the focus of the final placement session is on those players who remain on the “bubble” between two teams heading into the final placement session, where a decision still needs to be made.

Any player who is clearly a consensus A, B or C level player (based on the first 3 placement sessions and ratings) is likely to receive less ice-time during the scrimmage than those who are on a “bubble”. That said, WYH is committed to insuring that every player receives a fair and thorough look over the course of the 4 placement sessions.

Finally, a week or so after the last on-ice session a meeting is held to finalize the placements. The President, ACE Coordinator, at least one member of The Coaches Committee, the Placement Coordinators and all the on-ice evaluators attend the meeting.

Each child is discussed and the teams are finalized. Most of the discussion in the final meeting focuses on the remaining “bubble” players. No decisions are final until there is consensus.

No child who is in the second year in an age bracket will move down unless the bracket expands (i.e., has more teams). That is, if the Pee Wee bracket grows from 3 teams in one season to 4 teams for the next season a player on the C1 team could be placed on the C2 team as a second year player. If the bracket remains the same (or contracts) a second year player will never move down.

The last step in the process is that all the head coaches are assigned. We say, “The coaches follow the kids”. A particular head coach is not assigned to a team until his child has been placed on that team. Head coaches are given the authority to pick their assistant coaches (with input from the ACE Coordinator and President).

The Board of Directors of Winchester Youth Hockey believes that outside evaluators who don’t know the children would add little value to this process. The final few selections on each team are generally very difficult. We believe that it is very important when making these final selections to know a child’s past few teams, his attendance history, etc. Outside evaluators would know none of this information. In addition, the only placements that we know of that have been adjudicated in a court of law have involved outside evaluators. Finally, outside evaluators are very expensive. The cost of outside evaluators would be around \$6-8,000.

There is no placement process that will satisfy all. Joe Thornton wasn’t picked for the 2006 Canadian Olympic team and the complaints surrounding the recent US World Junior Team are numerous. We believe that our process is reasonable. Will some

children and parents be upset every season? Yes. This will always be the case as long as we continue to have a tiered (A, B, C...) system.

3. *Can we move Skills from Sunday night? Can Skills be an optional item?*

We are looking into the possibility of moving Skills and/or making Skills optional. It is important to understand that our ice allocation at Flynn is fixed (we share the total ice with other towns and other organizations) and we simply cannot trade two hours at Flynn on Sunday night's for 2 hours at Flynn on Monday night.

That said, we are exploring the possibility of moving Skills to a weekday. It is important to understand, however, that moving Skills to a weekday presents some other problems, which may be worse. If Skills were moved to Monday or Wednesday, for example, we would then be asking our youngest travel players to skate 5 days per week in many weeks: Tuesday (practice), Wednesday (Skills), Thursday (practice), Saturday (game) and Sunday (game). We believe that it may not be appropriate or desirable to have Winchester Youth Hockey activities on 5 days of the week. If we move Skills to Tuesday or Thursday we "crowd out" some of our most desirable practice ice and we move more of our practices to the weekends. This may be undesirable because weekend practices often conflict with games and we'd still be asking many teams to skate during the four hours of ice we own on Sunday nights.

If we can figure out a simple way to manage the process (e.g., setting up an option on our online payment system) we will consider making Skills an optional item.

4. *Why do Bantams skate so late (e.g., 9 PM practices)?*

Again, our ice is somewhat fixed. In a perfect world we'd have practice ice from 5 PM to 9 PM Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. All players would be home no later than 9:30 PM. Unfortunately, every other youth hockey program, Metro/EHF, Select, School Program, etc. is competing for ice from 5-9 PM on weekdays. Winchester Youth Hockey tries to set up the practice schedule so that the youngest skate first and the oldest skate last. We recognize that it is a challenge getting Middle School children home at 10:30 PM and on the bus by 7 AM but we really have few options.

5. *Why have we added 4 PM practices at Malden?*

Again, weekday ice from 5-9 PM within a ten-mile radius of Winchester is nearly impossible to find. A few years ago when we were near the tail end of our high growth period we approached The Valley League about buying some ice in Malden. 4 PM was the only available slot. We were able to shift this ice to 5 PM during the high school season since high school teams like the 4 PM slots. We will continue to monitor the usage of this ice and if our program contracts we plan to give up this ice.

6. *Can we require A and B players to attend a certain percentage of games or practices?*

As a town youth sports program this would be very difficult. Select/Metro/EHF teams can enforce attendance because they have consequences/penalties for non-attendance. We do not have penalties for poor attendance. We do not "bench" players for poor

attendance; however, attendance is often discussed in some of the difficult placement decisions.

That said, The Board of Directors of Winchester Youth Hockey has always believed that by retaining our best players ALL children benefit. In fact, it is a policy of Winchester Youth Hockey to encourage our best players to stay in the town program. The quality of ALL teams (A through C2) is improved if we retain our best players. To understand this, we don't have to look any further than our back-to-back State Championships at the Pee Wee B level the past two seasons. Had we lost Pee Wee A players to other programs our A team and B team (as well as the C teams) would have certainly been weaker. Again, there is a significant benefit to all if we retain our best players. We do not want to discourage our best players from participating (by requiring X% attendance). Unfortunately, this means that they will miss some events.

7. Can we build a rink and reduce the cost of the program?

This is highly unlikely. Several Directors have been involved in pro forma financial analyses of ice rinks over the past ten years. Every analysis that has been performed has shown that the cost per hour would be higher than what the MDC/DCR charge us at the Flynn, Somerville and Cambridge. The primary driver is land acquisition costs. If we could build a rink on state or town owned land that was donated it might be possible to build a rink and charge the same price as the MDC/DCR.

8. Why is the Girls-Only Program different than the Boys/Open Program?

First, the Winchester Youth Hockey Program has always been open to both boys and girls. We have many girls in our Mite Instructional Program and over the years many girls have played in our Boys/Open Travel Division. Recently we have had girls play in our Boys/Open Division as high as Bantam C and Bantam B.

Several years ago when some Board Members approached the full Board asking for a Girls-Only Division the Board agreed to begin such a program as long as ice was not taken from the Mite Instructional Program and Boys/Open Travel Program. The founders of the Girls-Only Program then went out and obtained ice at The Fessenden School, Somerville MDC, Belmont Hill, and more recently Malden, specifically for the Girls-Only Program. Today, most (not all) of the girls ice is at these facilities.

In addition, the leagues that the Girls-Only teams play in are not the same leagues as the Boys/Open Division Leagues. The number of games per league is different as are the costs per game. Also, the Girls Program Directors do not include holiday tournaments and state tournaments in their tuition calculations. The result is that the Boys/Open and Girls-Only Travel programs have different models and the tuitions are different.

That said, we expect the differences to shrink over the next several years. We believe that the girls will eventually play more games (the biggest cost driver) and the models will eventually be more similar than different. We are also looking to find more weekday ice for the Girls-Only program in the fall but we understand that girls' soccer is clearly the number one sport for girls in Winchester in the fall. We are also considering a

slightly later start date for the Girls-Only Program (e.g., 1 November) to avoid conflicts with fall sports.

9. Can we have non-checking teams at Pee Wee and Bantam?

This question is very timely given the number of injuries at the Bantam level this season. Some well-respected hockey people believe that checking should not be allowed below the age of 14. Unfortunately, unless there is a widespread call for this we cannot do much about this. The leagues we play in must abide by Mass Hockey and USA Hockey rules and the current rules in the United States are that checking begins at the Pee Wee level.

We could always have a no-check “in house” league but we don’t seem to see much support for an “in house” league in Winchester. We are constantly being told by our membership that the children want to wear a sweater with the sachem logo on it and play hockey against other towns. In addition, as stated previously, we don’t have the ice for an in house program.

10. How does WYH select their coaches?

There is basically a two-step process to the selection of coaches for our program. First, around February 1st of every year, we begin to solicit coaches for the following season. Those interested indicate their intention by completing a written application (available on our website) and delivering it to our ACE Coordinator. The ACE Coordinator, along with the President, reviews all the applications and prepares a priority list based on the qualifications on the application and on our prior knowledge of a coach’s performance in past years with the program. Once Placements are complete, and all the players have been assigned to teams, the ACE Coordinator and President then use the list of applicants to assign Head Coaches for each of our teams. The final roster of Head Coaches must be submitted to the Board of Directors for final approval. Once assigned to a team and approved by the Board, each Head Coach is given the authority to choose his assistant coaches, with input from the ACE Coordinator and President. All Head Coaches and Assistant Coaches are required to attend several USA Hockey coaching clinics and attain a certain level of “patching” in order to remain a “rostered” coach.

It is important to remember that we are a recreational, town program and we rely on volunteers to be our coaches. WYH does not pay or reimburse our coaches in any way, other than for incidental expenses (e.g. the cost of referees for a makeup game, etc). To hire and pay outside coaches would add significant expense to our tuition, which is not consistent with the goals of our program. Coaching requires an enormous amount of time and commitment. While all our coaches will vary in terms of skills and experience, WYH works very hard to choose the coach for each team that will provide a fun, safe and productive environment for all our teams.

11. Can my child attend another practice if he cannot attend his?

We get this question a lot and we simply believe that if we start allowing this that people will take advantage and we’ll have half the kids skating at different times. The model for

youth hockey is that it is tiered (A, B, C, etc.) so that children can develop with other children of similar skills (and age). We completely defeat all of that if we allow children to come at any time. In addition, as we've already said, we believe that the youngest should skate first (earliest) and the oldest last.

12. What is Winchester Youth Hockey's policy regarding out of town players?

Winchester Youth Hockey allows out of town players in a few cases:

1. We allow out of town children in Learn to Skate.
2. We allow out of town children who attend Winchester schools (e.g., St. Mary's) to enroll in any of our programs.
3. We allow children who have lived in Winchester and played in our program to continue to play for Winchester Youth Hockey if they move out of town, however, once they stop playing for Winchester Youth Hockey they are not allowed back into the program unless, of course, they move back to Winchester.
4. We allow out of town children to fill roster spots on our lowest travel team if we need additional players to fill the roster. Once these children are accepted into our program they may be placed on any team in subsequent seasons. If a child leaves the program he/she would not be allowed back into the program unless one of our lowest teams had roster spots available.

Winchester Youth Hockey does not allow new out of town players to compete for a spot on an A team. The Winchester Youth Hockey program is closed to all non-Winchester residents who did not participate in our program in the prior year unless the Board of Directors accepts out of town players for the lowest travel team.

13. Why does Winchester Youth Hockey conduct its placements in the Spring? Are placements a revenue generating activity?

There are several reasons for this but the primary reason is that our leagues begin just after Labor Day and we are not able to do placements in August due to the fact that our primary rinks are not open and many families are away on vacation. This season, for example, some of our teams had Valley League games on the Wednesday after Labor Day. In addition, given the uncertainty that always surrounds the opening of many of the rinks that we use we can never be certain that there would be ice available for placements in August or early September.

Finally, since most other teams now conduct Spring placements (e.g., Metro, Select, EHF) we believe that our member families can make better decisions over the Summer if we've already conducted our placements.

The placements are not revenue generating. When we develop tuitions for the upcoming season we subtract the registration fee from the total tuition required to set the tuition amounts for the Fall. For example, if we determine based on all the costs that we require \$1800 per player for players in the Boys/Open Travel Division we subtract the \$125 registration fee from this number and set the tuition at \$1,675 per player. If there were three payment dates then each payment would be roughly \$560. The registration fee is

not an added fee; it is pre paid tuition. This pre paid tuition is primarily used for pre season expenses such as league registration fees, pucks, socks and some pre paid ice rental fees.

The non-refundable registration fee is higher than most “try out fees” because we want to discourage children/families from registering who aren’t committed to participating in September.