

NIAGARA FALLS MINOR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

CHANGES TO TYKE INSTRUCTIONAL/INITIATION PROGRAM FOR 2015-2016 SEASON

The Niagara Falls Minor Hockey Association is constantly seeking to enhance and improve the programs that it offers to the children of the City of Niagara Falls. To that end, the NFMHA is making changes to its Tyke Instructional Program for the upcoming 2015-2016 season.

During the past two seasons, the NFMHA has offered two programs to children six years of age (i.e. as of December 31 of the year in which the season began) and younger:

1. Learn to Skate Program – Designed for children with little or no skating experience. Typically, the children were four years of age. One hour a week. Usually, Saturday mornings.
2. Tyke Instructional – Designed for children with at least a moderate degree of skating experience. Typically, the children were five and six years of age and were placed onto teams either randomly or based on their age, regardless of their skill level. Two hours a week. Usually, Saturday and Sunday mornings.

Also, during the 2014-2015 season, the NFMHA introduced a third program:

3. Junior Flyers Program – Designed for children with a keen interest in hockey, significant skating experience and at least a moderate degree of stickhandling, passing and shooting experience, who wished to augment or supplement the technical skills that they were receiving in the Tyke Instructional Program. Typically, the children were five and six years of age. Two hours a week, in addition to the two hours a week with the Tyke Instructional Program (i.e. four hours a week in total). Usually, Tuesday and Thursday evenings. An additional registration fee applies.

During the 2014-2015 season, the NFMHA adopted Hockey Canada's initiation program curriculum and practice format, emphasizing skill development, and developed lesson plans for the Tyke Instructional Program based on Hockey Canada's initiation program manuals A, B, C and D. For the rep development or Junior Flyers program, the NFMHA developed lesson plans based on Hockey Canada's novice manual. The programs and lesson plans have received wide acclaim and are being held out, by the Ontario Minor Hockey Association and others, as models for other local minor hockey associations to follow.

Difficulties have arisen, however, when children who were five or six years of age, with little or no skating experience, registered for the Tyke Instructional Program. Similarly, difficulties have arisen when children who were four years of age, with a moderate degree of skating experience, registered for the Learn to Skate Program. In both cases, the programs and lesson plans were not suited to the child's skill level.

Going forward, therefore, the NFMHA has decided to amalgamate the Learn to Skate Program and the Tyke Instructional Program into one program, called the Initiation Program (IP). Children born in 2011,

2010, and 2009 will register for the Initiation Program (IP). They will then be evaluated at the beginning of the season and placed onto teams based on their skill level, according to the following criteria, regardless of their age:

1. Learn to Skate (LTS) – Children with little or no skating experience. The lesson plans for the LTS teams will be based on the skating components of Hockey Canada's Initiation Program lesson manual A, emphasizing skill development. The focus will be on acquiring the fundamental movement skills associated with skating, including the ABC's of agility, balance and coordination, in a fun and safe environment.

2. Learn to Play Level One (LTP1) – Children with at least a moderate degree of skating experience, but with little or no previous stickhandling, passing or shooting experience. The lesson plans for the LTP1 teams will be based on Hockey Canada's Initiation Program lesson manuals A and B, emphasizing skill development. The focus will be on refining skating skills, with an emphasis on speed, and obtaining an introduction to and basic physical literacy in the areas of stickhandling, passing and shooting, in a fun and safe environment.

3. Learn to Play Level Two (LTP2) – Children with significant skating experience and at least a moderate degree of stickhandling, passing and shooting experience. The lesson plans for the LTP2 teams will be based on Hockey Canada's Initiation Program lesson manuals C and D, emphasizing skill development. The focus will be on refining skating, stickhandling, passing and shooting skills, with an emphasis on speed, in a fun and safe environment.

All IP teams will practice two hours a week, usually on Saturday and Sunday mornings. The children who are placed onto LTP2 teams will be given the option of registering for the rep development or Junior Flyers program, in addition to the two hours a week with their LTP2 team (i.e. four hours a week in total). Again, an additional registration fee applies.

Game play for the LTP1 teams will be modified in nature, as recommended by Hockey Canada, USA Hockey, the International Ice Hockey Federation and others, consisting of cross-ice games progressing to half-ice games. Game play for the LTP2 teams will also be modified in nature, consisting of half-ice games progressing to full-ice controlled scrimmages. Game play will start approximately halfway through the season, while maintaining a 3:1 practice to game ratio.

In sum, the NFMHA feels that, by evaluating children six years of age and younger at the beginning of the season and placing them onto teams based on their skill level, regardless of their age, with lesson plans for such teams tailored to such skill level, the programs that it offers to the children of the City of Niagara Falls will be enhanced and improved. Our Learn to Skate and Tyke Instructional Program had great success in 2014-2015, and we are looking forward to even more success with IP in 2015-2016 and beyond!