



Ten Myths About The American Development Model

By: Kevin Universal, President Carolina Amateur Hockey Association

I realize any change: good, bad, or indifferent is still a change and can be difficult for people to accept so I have started to collect a few of the negative comments that I have heard about the American Development Model (ADM) with regards to cross-ice play in the hopes that I can dispel these myths.

IT ISN'T REAL HOCKEY. USING HALF THE SURFACE AND THE SMALLER NETS WON'T HELP KIDS LEARN THE REAL GAME.

Do other sports ask their youngest athletes to play on a full-size football field, use a 10' basketball net, run 90' bases, or use a full-size soccer net? No. Smaller fields and equipment are used everywhere except in hockey. Age-appropriate surfaces and equipment help put the game into perspective for younger kids, allow for better development of their skills, and most importantly, help make the game more fun for the kids!

IT WILL BE TOO CROWDED ON THE ICE.

I have now seen two practices in person with 60+ mites on the ice at the same time and have watched multiple videos of practices with the same amount or more and have yet to see it look crowded. Well-planned practices with the right number of coaches to help run stations are effective ways to use ice efficiently without crowding. All of the kids I witnessed at these practices and jamborees were engaged in fun drills or games with lots of puck time and plenty of smiles!

THE KIDS WON'T LEARN TEAMWORK.

How much teamwork is involved with one skater taking the puck from one end of a full sheet of ice, skating it all the way down, and then shooting before most of the other teammates can catch up or get involved in the play? You know you have seen it at a mite full-ice game over and over. Cross-ice forces kids to work together in smaller areas to develop scoring opportunities and be creative.

THE KIDS WON'T LEARN TO SKATE.

The ADM actually emphasizes age-appropriate skating drills, but also places a lot of focus on fun drills and activities that help players develop more over the long term. The smaller areas also help kids increase their quickness and explosive speed which is best developed at the younger ages.

THE KIDS WON'T LEARN ABOUT POSITIONING.

It won't matter if kids know where to be if they can't skate there or if they don't enjoy the game. Also, teaching position too early can stifle creativity and a player's ability to think on the fly. Players can learn more when they are older about positioning, breakouts, and forechecking systems without hurting their development early on.

THE ADM IS ONLY FOR THE AVERAGE PLAYER.

Kids learn, grow and develop at different speeds and the ones you think at age 7 might be the next superstar might not develop as fast as others later on. Providing good coaching and development to all is important when kids are young since early segmentation has proven to be unreliable as a predictor of which kids will develop into elite athletes. It's best for those kids who excel early on to continue to focus on age-appropriate drills that will best help their long-term development. Those drills can help both the 6-year-old who has been skating for three years and the 8-year-old who is enjoying his first season.

HOW WILL KIDS GET IN SHAPE OR GET THEIR CONDITIONING?

Have you battled for a puck in the corner and gone back and forth in about a 10' space for 20 seconds? Have you ever worked the top of a penalty kill and gone back and forth between the point and the slot four times? There are numerous ways kids can get conditioned in small areas or in small games so don't worry about missing out on that aspect with the ADM. There are a lot more ways than skating lines on a full sheet to build up conditioning, especially with fun drills and small area games that keep kids smiling and wanting more even though they are dead tired!

TOO MUCH FUN IS A BAD THING.

Really? If the kids are enjoying the puck touches, the small games, the scoring, and are learning to love development how can that ever be a bad thing? I just don't get that comment, but hey, people have said that (I can't make this stuff up). Think about it. If the kids come off the ice tired, developed, smiling, and excited about when they can come back again for more, where is the down side? I wish everyone could find something they enjoy so much that is also great for their long-term development!

THE RINKS AND ASSOCIATIONS ARE JUST TRYING TO MAKE MORE MONEY BY JAMMING MORE KIDS ON THE ICE.

It couldn't be further from the truth. First, re-read the concern about crowding. Second, more efficient use of the ice can decrease your costs and can increase the number of times you practice each week. I, too, was once a hockey snob when my kids were younger and thought they needed more full ice. They would have been better developed if they had used what ice they had more efficiently and practiced more often than having a full sheet all to themselves. This could have improved their skills, made the game even more enjoyable to them, and helped reduce the cost mom and dad felt each season.

THE KIDS WON'T HAVE AS MUCH FUN.

Ask your kids if they like to play games or stand around? Ask them if they like to carry the puck and score goals? Ask them if they like whistles and stoppages in play? Kids undoubtedly have more fun when they are actively engaged during practice or in a game. High-energy drills, variety of drills, drills with pucks, and small games all help develop kids while they are having loads of fun! Also cross-ice games support these same ideals with more puck touches, more scoring opportunities, less stoppages, and make for a more enjoyable game for everyone involved!

There has been a lot of research and effort by USA Hockey looking at how to approach the game so give the ADM a chance when your organization starts to implement pieces of the model and I am very confident you'll be pleasantly surprised with the results!