

# USA Hockey

## Body Checking Rule Proposal Background

### USA HOCKEY – BODY CHECKING RULE CHANGE PROPOSAL

The proposed rule change will move the age of legal body checking in games from 12U to 14U.

#### HOW DID THE DISCUSSION BEGIN?

The body checking discussion is one that has been going on for a long time within USA Hockey. This is a complex and emotional issue and is being looked at from many angles. Although safety is obviously a huge concern, we didn't approach this initially from the safety side of the equation. We began by looking at how players develop their hockey playing abilities. Over the past two years we began to evaluate how Squirt and Pee Wee skaters play and react in similar on-ice situations. We observed that Squirts tend to be more aggressive, and emphasize skills (skating, stickhandling, passing and body positioning) in an attempt to make plays. The conclusion was simply that players at the Squirt level attempt to play the game in the correct manner. However, in the same situations many Pee Wee players react differently. What was observed was that players at the Pee Wee level tend to either let the opponent get the puck first so that they can initiate body contact or they lay off so that they don't get hit. Although this may not be true for every player, we have found that it is common and prevalent at all levels of Pee Wee hockey throughout the United States. With this being said, we do know that physiologically (and most importantly), players at this age are in their prime "window of opportunity" to acquire sports skills. The current rules we have in place hinder our children from acquiring these skills at the highest possible level.

#### WHAT ELSE WAS LEARNED DURING THE STUDY?

Although the original focus was not on the injury side of this issue, there has been so much medical research conducted and brought forward that it simply cannot be ignored. USA Hockey must always consider the health and safety of its players. There have been multiple recent studies (in Canada at the AAA level) showing that the serious injury rate at Pee Wee is four times greater in checking vs. non-checking leagues. Of note is the identical injury rate between those same two groups in practice (low).

What also came to light is the fact that, cognitively, the 11 year old brain has not fully developed the ability to anticipate while multitasking. Anticipation is 50% of a player's ability to protect himself and avoid heavy contact that leads to these serious injuries. We realize there should be contact in hockey; however, we do not want to place players into a situation where their cognitive skills are not yet fully developed to protect themselves. This is a function of brain development that players cannot "learn" by doing. In addition, when it comes to concussion baseline testing, it's been shown that the Pee Wee age brain is not yet developed enough to conduct accurate baseline testing.

#### WHO ELSE WAS INVOLVED IN THIS DECISION PROCESS FOR USA HOCKEY?

USA Hockey's Player Development Committee and Body Checking Sub-Committee. The Body Checking Sub-Committee is made up of experts from a variety of areas. This includes people like USA Hockey's ADM Regional Managers, Al McInnis, Mike Milbury, Dr. Michael Stuart from the Mayo Clinic who is USA Hockey's Chief Medical Officer (all three of Dr. Stuart's sons have played in the NHL), and many others. USA Hockey has taken a very inclusive look at this issue.



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### **WOULDN'T THE RULE CHANGE HURT BIGGER PLAYERS?**

During the Pee Wee years (11-12 years old), most male players are on the cusp of hitting their adolescent growth spurt. It is still to be determined who will end up being the bigger players in the long run. The player that has greater size and strength at Pee Wee may end up being on the average or smaller side when everything evens out during the later teen years. This means that players who rely on size and strength at an early age do not develop the necessary playing skills they need to be effective later on. Body contact and body positioning skills are far more important for a player to acquire at the Pee Wee level and are the precursors to effective checking and playing skills as they get older.

### **WHAT IS BODY CONTACT vs. FULL BODY CHECKING?**

It is not accurate to simply say USA Hockey is taking checking out of Pee Wees. The overall proposal is to increase the allowable body contact beginning at Mites and progress through Bantam when full, legal body checking would begin in games. As an example, the American Developmental Model (ADM) Red, White & Blue Hockey at 8U introduces the cross-ice environment to increase traffic and congestion and thus the associated natural body contact by simply reducing space.

The proposal would then increase the allowable body contact as players progress through Squirts and Pee Wees. Competing at the puck, angling to gain possession or stopping an offensive attack are examples at these levels. An important objective of this proposal is to eliminate the "Big Hit" in Pee Wees where players ignore the puck and try to 'blow up' an opponent.

Though not allowed in games, coaches will be asked to introduce and teach full body checking techniques in every practice (~85 practices / year = ~170 total during the two years) during the two Pee Wee years. We believe this to be a better solution than what we often times see today as a single weekend "introduction to checking" clinic. The proposal is to provide players with two years to acquire the necessary checking skills in a safer environment.

### **WHERE CAN I GET MORE INFORMATION?**

You may check out the following web page featuring information on the rule change proposal, which includes presentations by experts such as Brian Burke, General Manager of the NHL's Toronto Maple Leafs, Dr. Michael Stuart, and many others.  
[http://www.usahockey.com//Template\\_Usahockey.aspx?NAV=ET\\_03&ID=299508](http://www.usahockey.com//Template_Usahockey.aspx?NAV=ET_03&ID=299508)

### **WHEN WILL WE KNOW & WHEN WOULD IT TAKE EFFECT IF PASSED?**

USA Hockey's Board of Directors, Councils, Committees & Affiliate Presidents have discussed all playing rule proposals at their Winter Meeting in January 2011. The USA Hockey Board of Directors will vote on the proposal in June 2011. If passed, the change would take effect in the fall of the 2011-2012 season.

### **WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE SPRING OF 2011 AT U12?**

No change to spring 2011 hockey. The 2011 spring season will be played under the current rules and format since the proposal will not be voted on until June 2011.

### **WHAT HAPPENS TO THE PEE WEES GOING INTO THEIR SECOND YEAR?**

Due to the nature of the two-year hockey levels, second year Pee Wees will continue to learn proper checking during their training sessions so they can better apply them in 14U Bantam games. If the rule proposal is passed, all Pee Wee hockey will be played under the new rule effective immediately.



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## **Body Checking Rule Proposal Information on the Internet**

### **PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**

- Body Checking Presentation
- Checking the Right Way for Youth Hockey
- USA Hockey Off-Ice Checking
- ADM Stage Documents
  - Fundamentals
  - Learn to Train
  - Train to Train
- FAQ Page

### **SAFETY**

- Dr. Mike Stuart's Mayo Clinic Concussion Presentation
- Caroline Emery Study
- USA Hockey Player Development Sub-Committee on Body Checking Recommendation

### **ENDORSEMENTS and MEDIA**

- Brian Burke – General Manager, Toronto Maple Leafs
- Ron DeGregorio & Kevin McLaughlin talk to Maksymum Hockey Radio Show
- Toronto Globe & Mail Article
- Quebec Radio Interview

**All of the above information can be accessed at:**

[http://www.usahockey.com//Template\\_Usahockey.aspx?NAV=ET\\_03&ID=299508](http://www.usahockey.com//Template_Usahockey.aspx?NAV=ET_03&ID=299508)

