

Youth Hockey Structure Western Pennsylvania

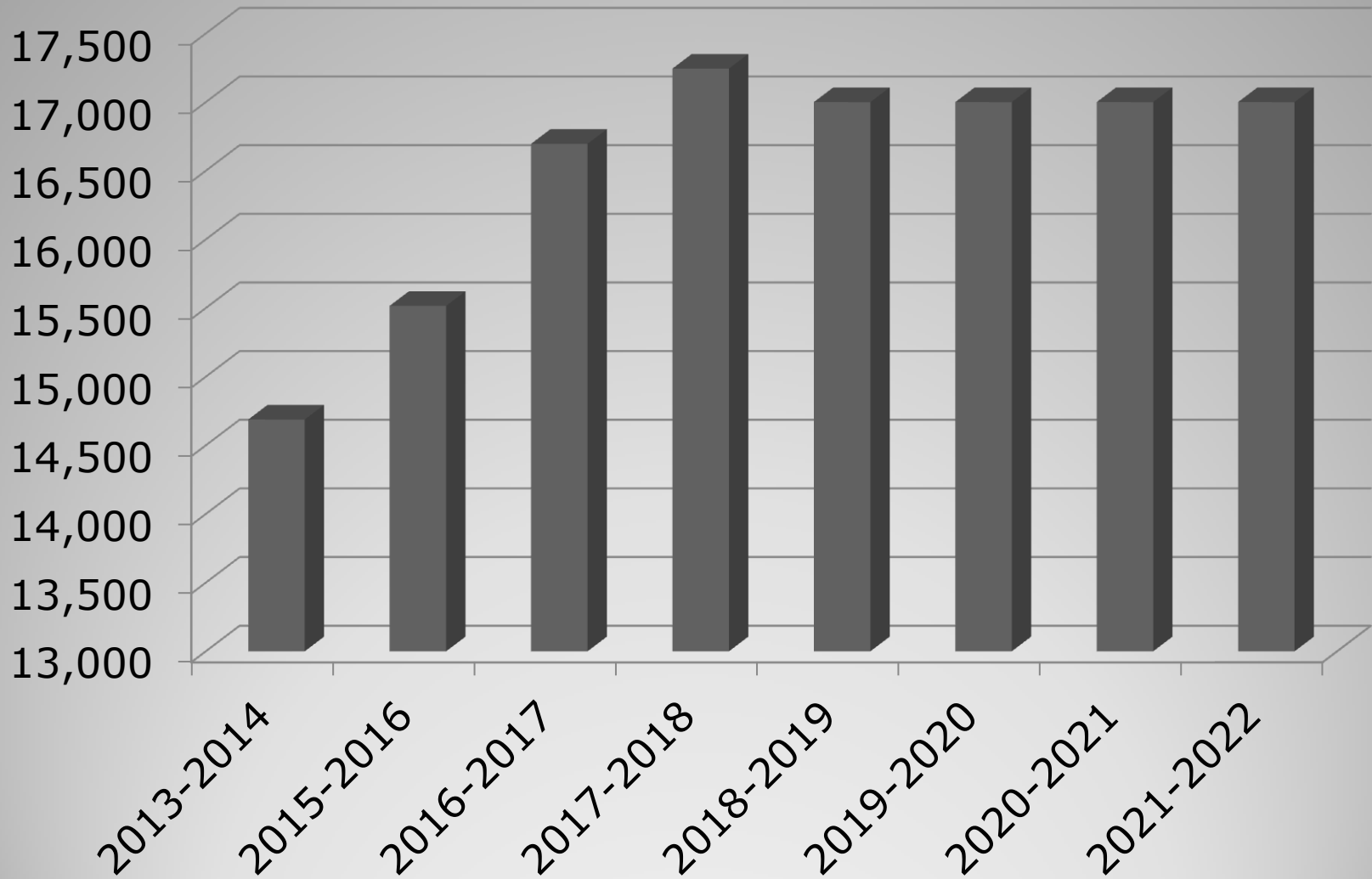


Our sport has experienced unprecedented growth in the region over the past ten years. Participation in the Mite age group has increased by 180%, Squirt by 82% and Pee Wee by 44% since the 2006-07 season. The increase in participation can be attributed to a number of factors, notably, the on-ice success of the Pittsburgh Penguins, the “Crosby effect”, the Little Penguins Learn to Play program, USA Hockey’s American Development Model and the hard work that both the PAHL and PIHL have done to promote and grow the sport.

While all parties should be applauded for the increase in participation, our structure continues to be dysfunctional and disorganized. There is no clear “career path” for our athletes, and our amateur and high school leagues compete for players, coaches and ice time in the same season for all age levels. Couple the increase in participation with the dysfunctional structure, and organizations will be soon forced to cut players or entire teams. Obviously this will be counterproductive to our efforts.

As we have discussed with the current leadership of both the PAHL & PIHL, our system needs to be updated to minimize the overlap that exists between leagues. Collectively, it is our responsibility to restructure our developmental model to provide a clear “career path” with options for all of our athletes, regardless of skill level, time commitment or economic status.

Overview



USA Hockey Registration Forecast for Western Pa.

- Extensive Overlap between PAHL & PIHL schedules
- Competition between leagues for the same pool of players, coaches and ice time.
- Players are able to play for multiple teams during the same season.
- Forcing players to choose between high school & amateur games/practices while having paid for both
- Teams have difficulty scheduling proper practice to game ratios as recommended by USA Hockey.
- Too many travel programs
 - For Example NPYHA has 5 Squirt teams, 6 Pee Wee Teams, 5 Bantam Teams and 5 Midget teams – none of which receive ample ice time.
- Limited ice time available for in-house programs
- Extensive financial and time commitment for families.
- Lack of coordinated effort between leagues and facilities to increase participation & improve the quality of the game

Current State of Youth Hockey



In order to provide a visual framework of the segments of youth and amateur hockey the Pittsburgh Penguins and key stakeholders have developed an organizational developmental Pyramid.

This pyramid depicts all major levels of youth and amateur hockey and was developed with the ADM model in mind. While individuals may be exposed to the game at many of these stages, it is the hope of the Penguins to expose youth at an early age and provide tools/transition plans for players to move up the pyramid.

Youth Hockey Developmental Pyramid

Over the past 24 months, USA Hockey and the Pittsburgh Penguins have met with leadership of the PAHL, PIHL and owners of our local ice rinks. While it is clear that the model needs to be restructured, a compromise that is acceptable to all stakeholders has not been met.

This past summer, USA Hockey approved legislation that clearly defined high school hockey as grades 9-12. Recently a meeting was held to explain the impact of the new legislation on our marketplace. While the meeting provided insight into why the legislation was adopted and the timeline associated, it has created confusion in the marketplace for high school associations and rink owners.

At this point in time, we felt that it was important to provide our shared vision for a streamlined youth hockey developmental system that provides a clear “career path” for players, enhances player development opportunities and provides options for all players, regardless of skill level, time commitment or economic status.

Our Vision

Level	Ages	Commitment		
		Financial	Time	Skill Level
In-House	4 to 18	Minimum	2 days per week	Recreational
Youth League	Full Season - 8 & Under through 13years of age or enter 9th grade. Pre/Post Season for Midget aged and U15 divisions	Moderate	3 to 4 days per week	Advanced
High School Hockey	Midget/U15 will play pre post until November at that time, Grades 9 through 12 will play high school hockey.	Moderate	3 to 5 days per week	Advanced

Our Vision - Career Path

Factors that led us to determine that shortening the length of the JV and Varsity hockey season, to complete the same number of games, along with developing a PAHL U 15 division and a split season for Midget hockey is for the greater good:

Impact	
Families/Athletes	League
Players will be able to fully commit to one team, all of the time	Hockey becomes a true Winter Sport
A more consistent practice to game ratio allowing ample time for skill and team development	Increased skill level
More time for proper off-ice training	Increased skill level
More time to focus on school work	Well rounded athletes
The ability to participate in Fall and Spring Sports	Increased skill level
Eliminate the majority of travel weekends; decreases cost	
By clearly defining season start and end dates for both leagues uniformed tryout dates can be established	Opportunities for mini camps

Rationale

Factors that led us to believe that restructuring Freshmen/Developmental hockey is for the greater good.

- Competition
 - Approximately 35% of high school Freshmen games end with a 5-9 goal differential
- Birth year vs. Grade Level
 - 6th Graders vs. 8th Graders = Three Year Difference. Not allowed under USA Hockey
 - Height and Weight
 - 6th Grade Average Height and Weight - 12 yrs old – 4'5" and 5'4" and 70 lbs – 110 lbs
 - 8th Grade Average Height and Weight - 15 yrs old – 5'4" and 6'1" and 90 lbs – 175 lbs
- Skill Level
 - Potential for Pee Wee B and Bantam AAA player on the ice at the same time
- PAHL competition level will increase
- Overall cost of hockey will decrease. Families will not be 'pressured' into paying for two teams during the same season
- The minority of players who are not already playing youth (amateur) hockey will move into the PAHL; with coordination players from the same schools will often end up playing on the same team under the PAHL umbrella in the appropriate skill level or in an in-house program.
- PIHL Varsity & JV hockey becomes paramount when players enter 9th grade.

Rationale – Springtime Freshmen Hockey

Changes:

- Developing a true “house league” for players of all age levels at each facility – in partnership with host facility
- Developing a pre/post schedule that minimizes the overlap of the PAHL & PIHL seasons, which would consist of the following changes:
 - Develop a Split Season (Pre/Post) for Bantam & Midget Levels (PAHL)
 - Create a 15 & Under Division that will play a Pre/Post schedule
- Limit each association to (4) teams per age group
- Restructure and emphasize ‘Girls’ Hockey

Impact

- House League – Provides a cost effective introductory program or an alternative for those who want to play recreationally, but do not have the time or resources necessary to participate on a youth (amateur) or high school team.
- Pre/Post Schedule - Eliminates competition for **Ice Time, Players and Coaches**; opportunities for introductory programs
- By eliminating ‘league overlap’ each administration will be able to narrow their focus and grow within defined parameters.

Youth Hockey (PAHL) Impact

Changes:

- Condense JV (9th to 12th Grade) and Varsity (9th to 12th Grade) to November through February
- Restructure the Freshmen/Developmental divisions to follow USA Hockey age grouping and moving the season to March, April and May

Impact

- High school hockey follows the 'Winter Sports Calendar'
- Eliminates competition for **Ice Time, Players and Coaches**. Players will still have a chance to play for their school and coaches will be able to interact with the younger players.
- Other than seasonal changes, programs keep the same structure
- By eliminating 'league overlap' each administration will be able to narrow their focus and grow within defined parameters.

High School Hockey Impact

Changes:

- Developing a true “house league”, for players of all age levels at each facility – in partnership with youth hockey association
- Restructure the Freshmen/Developmental divisions to follow USA Hockey age grouping and moving the season to March, April and May

Impact

- Developing an in-house league and the potential for a high school spring league provides private and public facilities with a financial incentive to participate in growing the game.
- Extends Ice Time sales during off-season

Ice Arenas Impact

Youth (Amateur) Hockey Changes

- Develop a Split Season (Sept/Oct and Feb/March) to complete the same number of games for Midget aged players and 15 U Division
- Create 15 & Under division
- Limit each association to four teams per age group for Pee Wee, Squirt and Bantam
- Growing girls hockey
- Complete planning & budget transparency accompanied by salaries for administrators

High School Hockey Changes

- Move the PIHL Season to November through February – to complete the same number of games
- Limit the PIHL to high school age players
 - Junior Varsity – 9th to 12th Grade
 - Varsity – 9th through 12th Grade
- Complete planning & budget transparency accompanied by salaries for administrators
- Move Freshmen/Developmental season to the springtime
 - Better Game times; no more 9:50 pm start times.

Facility – In House Changes

- Develop true house league program for all age groups at each facility. These leagues could be operated by an independent agency, or by the facilities.

Summary of Suggestions for Reorganizing the Sport

In the end, these changes make sense for each of the stakeholders. To ensure the entire youth hockey community is working together to foster development and allow every player the opportunity to play regardless of skill level, time commitment or economic status; we would like to propose - **Creating one governing body that consists of representatives from each stakeholder group, working towards unified growth and long-term sustainability.**

USA Hockey

Tier I Hockey Rep.

Facilities Rep.

Pittsburgh Penguins

Referees

In-House Hockey Rep.

Youth Hockey League
President

High School Hockey
President

Coaches Rep.

Impact on the Youth Hockey Community

By working together we can establish an organizational structure, reduce the dysfunction the youth hockey community is currently operating under and ensure long term stability.

End Result