

# AHA Birth-year Teams Survey

This survey was sent to 285 email address qualified as parents of the 185 2004, 2005, 2006, and 2007 players.

The first question qualifies respondents and directs them to one of the two remaining sections.

Section 1 “Squirt player experience” was answered only by parents of 2005 and 2006 players that were on birth-year teams during the 2015-2016 season.

Section 2 “ Peewee 04 and Squirt 07 Expectations” was answered only by the 2004 and 2007 parents that would be newly affected if the birth-year teams continued.

# Birth-Year Teams Survey All changes saved in Drive



SEND



QUESTIONS

RESPONSES

126

## 126 responses

SUMMARY

INDIVIDUAL

Not accepting responses



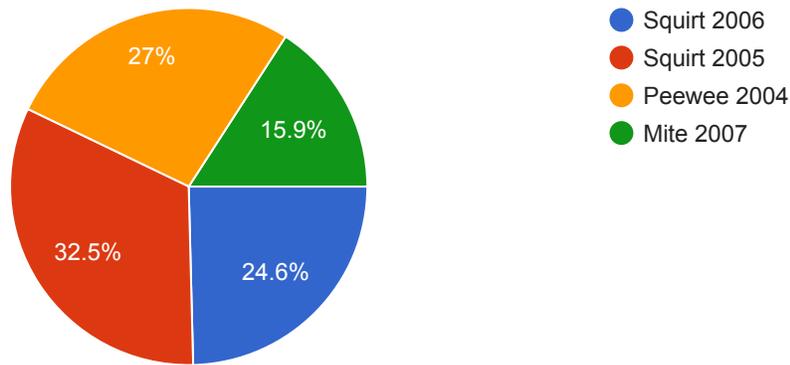
Message for respondents

The form "Birth-Year Teams Survey" is no longer accepting responses.

Try contacting the owner of the form if you think this is a mistake.

### Do you currently have an AHA player participating in Squirts, second year Mites or first year Peewee?

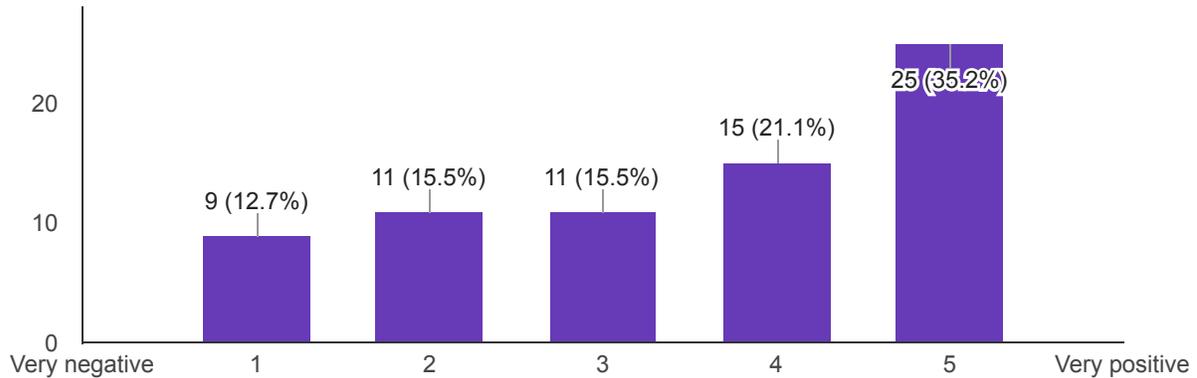
(126 responses)



# Squirt player experience

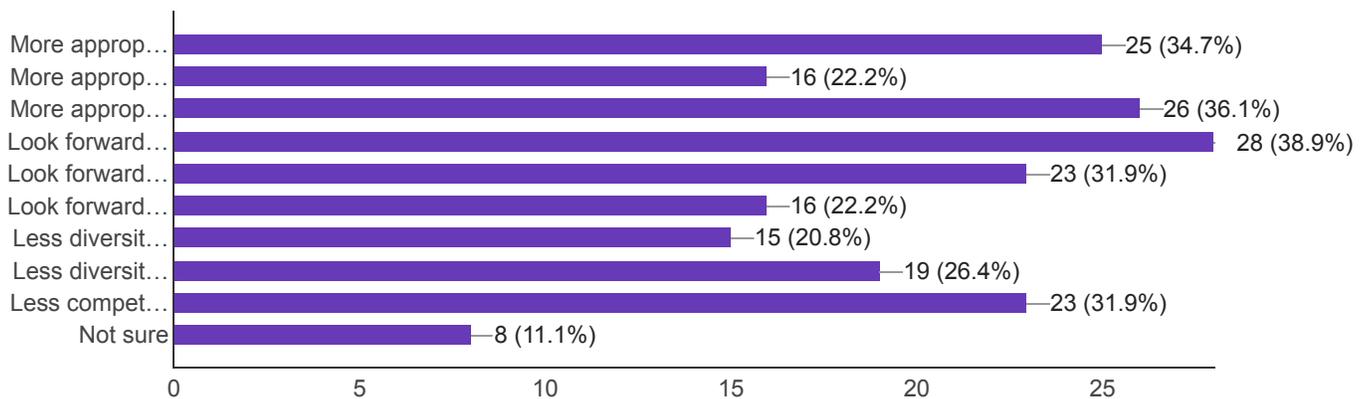
How would you characterize your player's overall experience in the birth-year team format?

(71 responses)



What outcomes, positive or negative, did you experience or do you anticipate with the BY format?

(72 responses)



Any other comments about the Squirt birth-year program? (42 responses)

It would be better to do so by grade, not birth year, for real continuity, with teammates and families, so kids can play with classmates throughout their youth hockey experience. My child has a late [redacted] birthday, so is playing with kids a grade up in school, with whom he will never be classmates, and feels left out when hearing classmates talking about their games together. The calendar system makes no sense whatsoever if continuity is the goal.

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with classmates throughout their youth hockey experience. My child has a late [REDACTED] birthday, so is playing with kids a grade up in school, with whom he will never be classmates, and feels left out when hearing classmates talking about their games together. The calendar system makes no sense whatsoever if continuity is the goal.

I feel that the single year format is a not optimal for player development. It limits the ability for players to lead and younger players to learn from the older players. That's a very important part of being a team. I truly feel my son would've had a more beneficial season provided it was a multiyear team. Please go back to traditional two year teams. It was working so why change it? Thanks for asking for opinions!

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Our program is one of the largest in the state. Most programs don't have as many Squirt teams as we have in one birthyear. This makes perfect sense - please continue this next year.

Don't like how we got creamed in every tournament bc competing kids a year older

This has been a great year for my [REDACTED] [REDACTED] has enjoyed playing with the kids [REDACTED] has known since playing hockey. [REDACTED] it made a world of a difference in putting teams together. To make this even better I would suggest if we could to have placements in September.

I think it was a good experiment, but I would rather go back to the mixed birth year format. I think for the Squirts 05 team, it somewhat diluted our kids skills and energy. Loving the coaching, parents, and kids though.

Not sure why we are remotely interested in being the only team in the Valley League to do this??? this is awful for late month bdays....way more negatives than pluses.

I think the format worked well.

[REDACTED] [REDACTED] I believe kids should be placed by their ability. There are some '06 players that should be playing up and vice versa. I also feel playing with older kids is better in terms of development provided the younger player is of equal ability. Holding them back makes no sense to me.

We really didn't like it and probably will jet do travel teams next year. Sad really.

We compete with teams that have older player (2005) so it hard sometimes for our 2006 squirt. For the Squirts 2005 I think it give them more competitiveness since they play against 2006/2005 players

As a Squirt 05 parent, I can only speak from what my son would have missed out on if he had been unable to skate with and learn from Squirt 04 players last year. My concern is this "banding" will have a negative impact on the development of our players and on the overall program. We should be organizing our teams and players around skill level and seeking to play the best competition at every level. We do not play in a league (VHL) which is organized by birth year. If parents/players are looking for major/minor separation, they should play elite/select hockey. Town hockey is exactly that - town hockey. Give the players the opportunity to play with kids from the whole town, not just a small group of twelve families. And what happens when one or two of those players develops differently than the others? Is AHA going to be willing to drop those players down? We've introduced a dynamic which doesn't benefit our program, our families, and most especially, our players.

Hope it continues next year!

Such a shame to break these kids into single birth year. I understand the argument for team cohesiveness. This one works if the team is a well formed cohesive group. This does not always happen, despite everyone's best efforts.

There is so many advantages for the younger of the two years to have the exposure and experience to play on a team with the older players. They learn maturity, on and off the ice, experience and when the move on to middle school, have older kids that they already know.

Also, we should strive to form these teams based on ability. The best players make the top teams. Teams would have been very different this year if they were actually placed by abilities.

Once we were moved up the brackets and started playing teams with similar talent, our kids have been challenged. Moving to full ice this year, our kids have developed well as a team with outstanding coaching. Our roster will mostly stay together for our 2nd year of Squirts and I'd like to see it continue beyond that

It was OK. The team felt like any other team he was on. There did seem to be a bigger gap in talent from the best players to the weakest players. This may have been minimized had we not had birth-year teams.

Fantastic bonding among players, coaches and families. The best experience of our son and family's hockey life. The kids are poised to build on their individual development and team concepts to accelerate their progress next year. I don't believe they will progress as quickly next year if we shuffle the coaches and make material roster changes. Having head coach continuity is very important to us and most families on our team.

Last year in Squirts, we had a mix of playing skill levels and ages. Our son gained so much from that format. This year felt stagnant; all the kids were roughly the same level and had nothing to teach each other. When you mix the teams, it allows some players to step forward as leaders and allows younger or less experienced players to gain helpful instruction from their peers, rather than just coaches. Mixing the birth years in the teams is a helpful way to let kids naturally fall into leadership and follower roles. It's healthy and promotes diverse skillsets. Forcing all the kids from the same birth year into teams is stifling the natural balance that develops when you have a team with kids up to two years apart in age.

Our family has been part of the AHA community for 5 years, so we have experienced the original format for Squirts (2 birth years) and this year we experienced the single birth year. I feel that the 2 year teams have a greater positive effect on player development as well as social development. A goal of youth sports, in my opinion, is to have children learn to work with others to be successful. As they move into high school, college, career no matter what they choose to do (hockey, debate club, theater) they will not be with children only of the same birth year. I believe by only having them play with birth year peers, it is not fostering their understanding of how the real world works. Wouldn't we all like to pick the kids, families, coaches that our kids spend most of their year with? But I feel that it is not for the betterment of player development. Part of the mission statement of AHA says "giving all players the opportunity to participate to the best of their ability, to develop as athletes, and to grow more confidently into young adulthood." I don't feel moving to single year teams will support that mission.

My feeling is that this program presents considerable challenges to the Valley League in parity. We need to conform to what our competition is doing and as far as I'm aware no other towns do this. I do not believe it's a good idea to force feed something upon our membership to something that USA Hockey itself does not condone.

I find the BY experiment to be a poor experience for my son. My son played with about 7-8 players who should have played on the lowest Squirt levels, and those 7-8 played at a level far above what they should have been playing at. Those 7-8 spots should have been filled with 2006 Blue players, who are playing at a level currently below their talent.

We have won only 4 games this year, lost about 25, and they have been of the 9-2, 6-0 variety, which is not fun for the kids. During the course of the year, we have actually dropped down from AA to A level, so that my son is playing at a level below where he should be playing at.

What was also disappointing is that there was absolutely no opportunity to move up and play higher competition. Teams were selected in May for games that didn't begin until September, and over the course of 6 months, there

has not been one opportunity to move up. I don't know if there was a directive from AHA to discourage coaches from requesting substitutes from other teams below their level, but it's disappointing that there has not been one opportunity during the entire season.

I also believe that this has changed the mindset of the coaches to treating our team like a rec league. I see the kids making the same mental mistakes week after week, which leads me to believe that the coaching is not at the caliber of the other levels.

My biggest concern is that my son is now boxed in with these group of players, and that there is no way for him to get out of that box. My son attends every practice and game and has taken this as a challenge to work as hard as he can to get on a better team. My fear, however, is that he could play like Patrick Kane at evaluations (if we even have evaluations) and he will still be placed on the lowest Pee Wee level, and this cycle starts all over again.

I especially feel bad for the parents of the 2006 White and Gray teams. How hard will it be for any of those kids to make the the top 2 Squirt teams next year with all of the success that those 2 teams have had? How could the parents of those kids not think evaluations (if there are any) to be a complete waste of time?

In short, we are strongly considering not being a part of AHA next year, and it is due to the birth year format.

The talent level on our team this year was very similar from top to bottom. No player seemed misplaced and it made our practices better because everyone could compete and do the drills at a similar skill level.

Seems like a reasonable way to divide the kids into 2 "smaller" groups and thereby isolate skill level better. My child is always much younger for his birth year (██████████), so he's kind of in the middle of both age groups (that's kind of the way I think about it). So, he could really go either way. He'll either be younger among older kids, or older among younger kids. So we don't really feel strongly. I think on balance the birth year division makes sense, for mostly administrative reasons. Our actual experience has been terrific, as well, so no complaints there. Maybe after Pee Wee you could see where people feel more strongly against the birth year divide, but I think for these kids who are quite young my guess is that the skill level is somewhat difficult to determine. We are also okay with mixing the birth years -- that also seems to be reasonable. You may have folks who feel strongly for birth year, or against birth year, and then you may have a lot of folks like us who don't feel strongly either way and would be supportive of AHA hockey either way.

You are limiting the ability to compete at the higher levels of the Valley League by having birth year teams. The teams in the top divisions have their best players on the teams. If the Valley League had birth year divisions it would be different, but they do not. I would consider this a failed experiment.

It was nice to consistent coaching and keeping teams together to continue to build on previous season

Placing players by skill level is more important than "maintaining chemistry" within birth year teams.

I strongly believe that AHA should not continue to break out teams by birth year based on the experience of this year. If this continues, I believe you will see dramatic reduction in the number children participating in Andover Hockey and it will decrease the level of success of AHA. The reasons I think that are due to inertia of teams, consistency of coaches, and players of high ability not being able to move to a higher level sooner.

Inertia of Teams Year After Year- I strongly believe that if you continue to create teams based on ability and birth year, you will find that it will be extremely difficult for players to move up and down. I do not see AHA having the backbone to freely move players from the #1 team down to a lower team. The board and the directors will want to avoid that type of conversation with parents and risk them leaving the program. That means that you will have kids trying out for maybe one or two spots on a higher team. It becomes the child on the higher teams spot to lose. The child who is lucky enough to get on the top team that first year will continue to be on the top team year after year and players on lower teams will feel that the deck is stacked against them and either leave AHA or quit hockey all together.

Consistency of Coaches- The consistency of coaches argument can be a positive or a negative. AHA coaches are all volunteers and in most cases they are parents of players. Coaches have a tendency to put their own child's interest first and we have seen this time and time again. Also, we have seen varying degrees of effectiveness of coaches. If you get a bad coach from the beginning, you will not want to be stuck with them for the child's entire youth hockey career. The result will be that children will leave AHA or hockey if they do not like the coach. Plus, I think it is important for kids to get used to different coaches and if those chances are reduced by the birth year model.

Players not playing to their ability- If you have teams ranked by birth year, you may have a younger child playing at a much higher level that could get experience on a higher level team. If a first year Squirt is playing at the AAA level, but they are the exception to the rest of the team, it is not fair to hold them back. On the flip side you may have disparity on the second year lower team where the kids with less ability are pulling the team down to A when a few kids on the team should be playing at AA. This holds back the whole team.

The birth year experiment has been a very negative experience for my child and I feel that it should not continue. I consider the 2005 Squirt Gray team to be a team of leftovers. We have a very large disparity in ability between the top players and the lower players. This has led to the team not really bonding since the better players are very upset at the players lacking skill and overall the team having such a losing record. We routinely have some players crying in the locker room after games because they are giving it their all and you have over ½ of the team simply not being able to play at same level. Just because they were born in the same year, they are mixed together. The better players are fully aware they are in competition with other teammates to hopefully be one of the lucky ones to prove that they can move up to a better team. If you continue the birth year program, and you do not have the backbone to have a fair and honest evaluation process and move kids up and down based on skill, I believe you will lose a lot of kids since they will believe that the dye was cast when they were first put on the birth year team.

My son was placed on a new team with both 2005 and 2006 players. It was a new team with a variety of skill levels and maturity. This team has not pulled together well. My son and a few of his teammates from last year are frustrated this year feeling like they are not all 2005 players like the other teams so are not playing at the same level of other 2005 teams and that they don't have a chance against those other teams. He was on a team last year that won almost every game, this year, I'm not sure they have won more than 2 games. This is the first year that my son is not eager to play with his team, feels like no matter what, they can't win.

In theory, I was definitely intrigued by the idea of splitting up by birth year for many of the reasons the AHA cited in its initial email to parents -- familiarity of parents and coaches being the primary reason. In practice, both as a coach and parent, I've not been completely thrilled with the idea for a number of reasons. I had a hard time knowing how to fill out the survey above, so my explanation below is a bit lengthy.

First and foremost, I believe splitting by birth year has watered down the pool that each of the squirt teams can pull from (both at the top and bottom). [REDACTED], I do not believe this really effected my team much. We might have had a couple kids switched, but the talent would have been similar regardless of whether the teams were split by birth year or not.

However, I believe this had a greater impact on the top and bottom teams of both years. A handful of the 2006 blue team could have at least made the 2005 gold team, and maybe one or two could have made the blue team. Although I understand the body size argument, in theory these players' skill should allow them to keep up regardless of body size and its a great thing to learn to play against players bigger than them. If a player never plays with bigger competition, freshman year of high school will come as a surprise when a 14 year old lines up against an 18 year old. The bigger issue I've seen is honestly with the 2005 white team. The range of talent of this team is unfortunate and you have some very good players ([REDACTED]) who are playing with kids who are one or two years out of initiation gold. If the birth years were combined [REDACTED] would be playing with more similarly skilled players, and the kids who are just out of initiation gold would be playing with the 2006 white team, who are also more similarly skilled.

I think my next issue could be addressed with better communication within the AHA program, but the way the 2005-2006 squirt teams were "named" as AA and A teams to the Valley League was not done correctly (this was admitted before the season even started) and had a negative effect on both teams. Because the 2006 Blue team was named an A team, they have not been in the right division until just recently and have consistently blown teams out. At the same time, the 2004 white team was named an AA team and have been getting killed all year. Neither situation is good for the kid's development – it's no fun to get beat badly all year, and it's not good for player development to roll over teams all year. My team has been fortunate enough after getting beat pretty bad in the first five weeks of the season to end up in a division where we've been about .500... but I don't think the Valley League knew what to do with the 2005 white or 2006 blue teams because of the way they were named.

Tough conversations are not a reason to not move forward with the idea of splitting by birth year. However, having the birth years mixed make the placement process much easier, in my opinion. By keeping birth year's split, there's a much greater potential for disgruntled players and parents who make the top team one year, and not the next. By having the birth years mixed, it's not likely that a player will make the top team as a first year squirt or peewee and allows for fluidity of talent to the teams they belong on.

Personally, [REDACTED], it was a tough to see the way the goalie situation was handled with the squirts this year. There were a total of 6 goalies in the 2005 birth year (for 4 teams), and if I'm not mistaken, only one in the 2006 birth year. Coming out of tryouts I was surprised to see that the goalies were kept to the birth years considering there were 7 goalies and 7 teams. Some of the 2005 goalies could have certainly helped the 2006 teams between the pipes. Instead, two of the teams ended up with multiple goalies (one 2005 goalie ended up moving to peewees to avoid splitting time). I am very realistic in realizing that splitting time is a potential reality for goalies, but I don't believe it was necessary this year and could have actually had a positive impact on all teams to have them split amongst all squirt teams, regardless of their birth year.

I am more than happy to discuss further if there are any specific questions based on my response above.

[REDACTED]

My vote is to keep the BY format. However, you must then identify the correct divisional ranking for each team. Let me add that the board is concentrating on the wrong issue. This program is too large to continue on a volunteer basis only. Time to bring in a paid Youth Director of Hockey to focus on issues that parents are discussing. - [REDACTED]

My son is on the 2005 Squirt Blue team and I have seen no benefit from this birth year program. It has actually been quite negative in my opinion. We were put in an elite level which we should not be in. None of the kids on the team are elite by any means. Collectively we are a good group of skaters but not elite. I believe that is reflected in the fact that we won a game on 11/21 but did not win another game until 2/7. If that is how it's going to be moving forward each year then I would say do away with the birth year program.

Much easier to place less of a pool of players

I don't think the BY format had much of an impact on my son's team this year, I cannot say the same for other teams but that is all second hand knowledge. I am strongly against continuing this into Pee Wees. My son has always benefitted from playing with "veteran" 04 players and when he was a "veteran" back in Mites, he always upped his game when a good, younger player made his team. It builds both confidence and humility. I believe not only is the birth year format taking those important components of the game away, it could also build a sense of entitlement among the teams that participate. I applaud AHA for thinking outside of the box, but this format seems more to benefit the parents as opposed to the players.

My son was on the Squirt "2" for 2005. While I understand and applaud the experiment to go to birth years, I feel very very strongly it should revert back to the old way. The reasons is as follows:

1. Level of play, skill development, and overall fun was significantly sub-optimal.

There were effectively 2 tiers of kids on the team...Tier 1 and 2. It was roughly evenly split and the drop off was quite noticeable. As a result, on the ice at any given time during most games, I noticed the following: a) the tier 1 kids not passing and/or getting frustrated with the tier 2s and b) the tier 2s not hustling and overall looking uncomfortable and out of place. I don't think individual players or the team as whole developed very much over the season b/c of this disparity in talent. I didn't sense there was as much fun shared in the locker room as I've seen in the past. I think both tier 1s and 2s would have been better off playing with kids with more similar ability...the tier 1s would hopefully be pushed more and work on passing and other selfless team skills...while the tier 2s would also benefit with improved confidence, fun and skill development.

## 2. Missed opportunity for leadership and mentorship.

Last year, my son was a first year Squirt. He was on a team that was mixed across the two birth years. Partly due to smart coaching, my son ended up bonding with an older kid on the team. He looked up to him and learned from him, and I sensed that the older kid really took to providing leadership and helping my son. This was not a unique relationship to these two boys. I witnessed many other similar situations in the locker room over the season. This year, I was looking forward for a chance to have my son be the "older" kid, to speak out, and to provide leadership and guidance potentially to a younger kid. He may not have taken advantage of the opportunity, but it would have been nice to have the chance. The benefit would have transcended hockey, and been a life benefit...providing value throughout high school and beyond. I mean how beneficial would it be for my son to start middle school and high school, and already have some trusted relationships with older kids...and then vice versa when my son would be a 7th grader and sophomore.

In closing, I believe that 7 months is way too long a season to get this wrong. Hockey is a fluid sport where parity matters a ton. The better kid who can't rely on his teammate to receive a pass will stop passing...the lesser kid stop trying...nobody wins. I believe the kids who will effectively be squirt 2s and 3s of the older year, and squirt 1s and 2s of the younger year will get hurt the most and will likely be forced to go to a travel team, or even worse quit the sport. Without a doubt the kids with similar abilities should be on similar teams. On a team of 12 or 14 kids, likely half would be from a similar age-group year anyway which is plenty to achieve the benefit of having all from the same year. So it seems like all downside and no upside. It seems like instead of benefiting from being the largest program in the state, we are disadvantaging ourselves with birth year teams.

Note that I wrote this letter from the vantage point of my second year Squirt 2 who I believe started the year as a "Tier 1". Importantly, the above is also informed by my experience with my daughter who is a "Tier 2" on a travel Mite team. Effectively, as her Mite season went on, she was increasingly getting frustrated and tiring of the tier 1 kids on her team taking over (they weren't mean or arrogant its just the way hockey goes). She almost wanted to drop hockey altogether or at least start playing only with girls next year because she perceived the level of play to be more equitable if she was only with girls. I believe I am somewhat unique in having this dual perspective, both from the Tier 1 parent and the Tier 2 parent, and feel very strongly that merging two or three age cohorts is absolutely the way to go to ensure the most similar level of talent are on the same team (i.e. less talent dispersion is ideal) which in turn will maximize the overall experience of all kids. We are so fortunate that our program is large enough that there can be so much parity...why take that benefit and turn it into a major cost??

Thanks for listening and good luck.

The 2006 players who hadn't played full ice last year in Mites may have had a slow start to the year if put with 2005 but with 35+ games, they would get the experience to contribute significantly to a potentially higher team and ultimately be on the team that best fit them.

As with everything, there are positives and negatives but my gut tells me that combining birth years is a better solution. A few reasons drive this:

- It will be harder for kids to move from team to team. I.e. to make a spot for a player that has improved a lot, we will need to send another player lower. This is a challenge the association hasn't faced yet.
- The best players should play together; whether they are 2005 or 2006. A team combined of these athletes will have

a better experience and both the team, and individuals, will see greater improvement. Conversely, the newer and more beginner players should have the opportunity to play together and develop at the same rate. With birth year teams, there is a greater disparity in ability at the lowest team. We should look at the record of each team in squirts. Not that winning the league is the sign of success (going at or near 500 is fine), but a team that loses consistently isn't fun for the kids.

-By shuffling and combining kids of multiple birth years, the entire AHA organization becomes stronger and more cohesive - meaning we will be a town program where both kids and parents have the opportunity to meet many families. By keeping teams together from year to year, coaches and families may become more protective and insular of their teams (and inevitable changes will be that much more hard to facilitate). A strength of AHA is its breadth and the opportunity to meet folks from others schools, areas of town, etc. Some might say this is more important than the hockey.

the birth year program constrains the number of teams any given set of kids is eligible for ('05 on 3 teams, '06 on 3 teams) which means there is a bigger spectrum of skills on any single given team - meaning there is huge delta between the best player and the worst player on a team.

it also seems that if you are mixing two birth years of kids you have a larger deck to shuffle year over year, which allows the placement to be elastic - kids improving quickly can leap frog and kids who are improving more steadily can play with other players at their level.

The goal of this program should be to provide a challenging and skill appropriate experience so that the teams can be slotted in a league that provides comparable competition thereby avoiding a season of one sided games (winning or losing). Achieving this goal will provide the more highly skilled players the opportunity to continue their development while providing the less skilled players the venue to play competitive hockey against appropriate level of completion. Consistency in rosters from year to year should be a distant second to that.

Having spent multiple seasons with multiple children in the club leagues, the birth year construct allows the youth player to develop an array of characteristics. If it is limited to the previous format in the "town" leagues, it places limitations on their experiences. It is my experience & opinion that it is why the club leagues have been ahead for so long. With AHA's size, this new format allows the organization to be at the forefront of this setup and will find other programs will also follow suit.

Most people associated with this trial run seem to believe the experience is positive with the exception of some of the higher placed players from the younger years, whose parents cite the need for more challenging competition. The funniest part of it is that more challenging and/or structured settings are available within the multiple club organizations available in the area... All of which are structured by birth year.

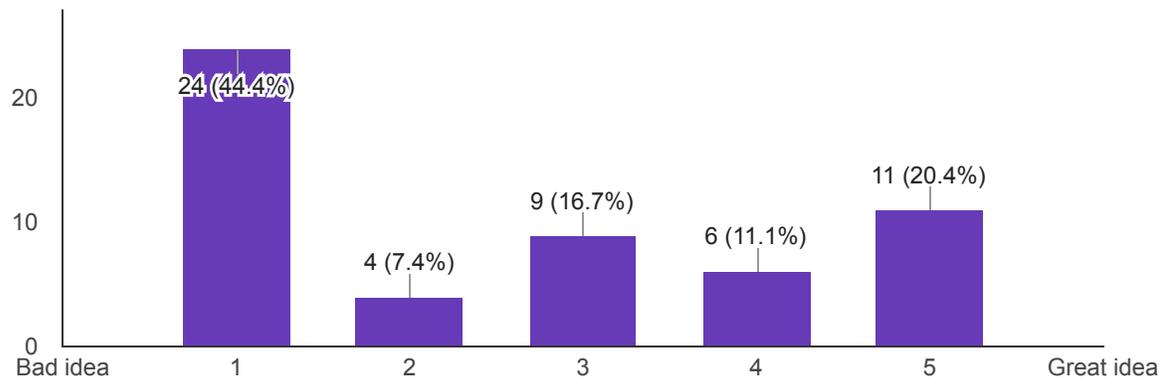
AHA needs to continue with this protocol. Change is difficult at first, such as Mite X-Ice, now that age group doesn't know any other format and enjoys the benefits afforded by that implementation.

My biggest concern is that players are locked in to a team and level. How will tryouts work so that skills acquisition is recognized. If a player on a lower team should move up, how will he unless a player on an upper team moves down? The other major problem was AHA and Valley League did a horrible job of level placement. This led to very bad parity and league playing level not being appropriate. I think it is a major problem to think that team rosters should be consistent from now through Bantams. Do some research on athletic development and recognize hockey is a late development sport. The best squirt today might not even make the high school varsity team. The future star might quit because he is passed over year after year in this system.

## Peewee 04 and Squirt 07 Expectations

## Do you welcome the idea of playing on a birth-year structured team?

(54 responses)



## Any other comments about the birth-year program for Pee wee 04 and Squirt 07?

(22 responses)

I think sorting by birth year makes sense, but some allowances for players with Fall birth years to opt into the same teams as their classmates makes sense, too. For example, if you were born in December 2006, could those players play with the 2007 Squirts, instead of being automatically placed into the 2006 squirts. same for September, October, November or December birth months.

My son is currently with an 03 team and it has been the best situation for him overall. Although this may not be feasible I would prefer he move up with his teammates.

I would like to see a minimum of 3 practices a week plus a game on Sunday's!

I have both a PeeWee 2004 player and a Mite 2007 player. I like that they play with different age groups and different kids each year. We have had a GREAT experience with playing with older kids and then being one of the older ones on the team. I think if people want to play on birth year teams they have the club teams to go to. I hope you DO NOT do the birth year structure. Thanks for asking our opinion.

I think the kids derive benefit from playing with different aged kids. Leadership can be learned. It can be a good opportunity for the older kids to lead and a good chance for the younger onea to be around older kids. I think the first year peewees benefited from the second years on my son's team this year.

Also, just to use my son as an example, there are plenty of 5th graders born in both 2004 and 2005. It would be nice for them to be able to play with each other

Having different ages on a team allows for mentoring old and younger kids.

With a single birth year the talent level from the top player to the bottom player is to large and you will create a mediocre team. If you have two birth years then the talent level for a team would be more consistent from Top to bottom.

The AHA is a club team let's not try to be one.

Let the kids play with players that can help them all excel!

I think it would do a much better job of keeping things fair in terms of ability grouping. In our experience, the reliance on coach feedback can be inaccurate because we have found there are some coaches who are biased. And once you are sorted down, it is nearly impossible to move back up.

I like the mentoring part for the older kids. This teaches them to be leaders. And gives the younger kids someone to look up to. Diff kids rolling in each year gives the kids a chance to try new roles. If ur with same kids and coach year after year you can easily get stuck in a role or position year after year. Many Andover coaches pigeon hole kids for a whole year. If ur with the same coach year after year your child could be pigeon holed for several years leading to kids leaving the program. I think going to birth year would be a big mistake for the program. I don't think the Andover coaches could be responsible enough to move kids around to diff position year after year. Most r not responsible enough to move kids around during a single year. All kids at these levels need experience at every positon.

My feeling is that this program presents considerable challenges to the Valley League in parity. We need to conform to what our competition is doing and as far as I'm aware no other towns do this. I do not believe it's a good idea to force feed something upon our membership to something that USA Hockey itself does not condone.

It is important for the kids to have an opportunity to play in the State Tournaments. My feeling is that 1st year players that are placed high get 2 opportunities for the States, but that good players that are placed lower may not get that opportunity at all. This is, I believe, because Andover's program is so large. If there is a birth year structured team, would that allow most players to have State Tournament opportunity? My now high school age son, played for AHA, when it was not so large, and had these opportunities. But my 11 year old, who is an equally, if not more, qualified player, has not had a chance to play in States - yet.

I'd rather not have my player affected. If this were to start in mites and grow that way I'd be fine with it, because it starts that way and it's all they know.

Like the idea of developing more chemistry on the teams

I think it's an advantage having mixed-birth years on teams, giving the 2nd year participants a chance to be "leaders" within the teams. AHA has done a great job of team assignment, in terms of skill & size.

I prefer teams set based on skill. Birth year sounds arbitrary criteria to me

As an educator for the past 22 years, I feel I have a good understanding of child development. This is a horrible idea. Children need to make new relationships and friendships every year. We would never send an entire class onto the next grade, just because it is easy and best for the parents. How do you account for different rates of development? My son is on a team with players that are two grades a head of him and it has been an incredible learning experience. It would have been devastating to his hockey development if he had been denied this opportunity. If USA hockey is not recommending this-why are we even talking about this? If this is such a great idea-why are no other towns doing this?

This is a terrible idea. I have been part of AHA for the past 6 years. All of the teams have been multi-year teams and my children have grown tremendously from the experience both as a player and a person. It is my understanding that we are the only town doing this. If it is such a great idea, why aren't other towns doing the same thing? Is AHA trying to be like a club team? If USA hockey isn't supporting this-why are we even discussing it?

PLAYERS RANK SHOULD BE SKILL BASED- BIRTH YEAR BASED

If an age when we are losing strong players to club teams regularly, we need to format our program to keep the strongest players in town and not just provide lower level teams for the non-club players. To do so, we need to give the younger PeeWee's the opportunity to make any PeeWee team to create the best teams possible.

In my experience over the past 8 years w kids on AHA teams (mite, SQ, PW, Bntm) our evaluation process almost always ends up placing two kids on each team that can be defined as "misplaced". One being the best on the team and the other being the worst. I know it's difficult to avoid this w/so many kids in AHA. To be clear, I don't have a problem w this aspect of the process. I think it's good to have a really strong skater on a lower team and a weaker skater on a stronger team.

My fear w a birth year system is this will happen on a much larger scale. The AHA has always found a good mix in age, experience and talent, to form competitive teams. If we go to strict birth years, I think there will be a larger discrepancy in talent and more kids will be playing way over or under their talent level. This will motivate more parents to move their kids to club teams.

While one could argue the positives of birth year teams (They play together longer, chemistry etc...) this doesn't mean a poorly balanced team will get better over the years. It just means they'll be stuck together for years. Each year a kid plays on an off balance team, those parents (and the players) will chase the club teams more aggressively. And the club teams will just keep creating teams to accommodate the masses.

I'd rather see AHA continue with its current format. AHA is a great program with a great reputation.

I realize I don't know what goals are in place w the AHA board, and by providing this feedback I also realize this isn't a decision that's going to be made easily.

Good luck in setting this ship in the right direction.

It doesn't seem like the birth-year structured teams could work unless the rest of the Valley League did the same. You would have talented younger players playing below their level due to the large number of Andover participants / teams. For example, the current PeeWee 2 team is comprised primarily of 2004 birth year kids. If the birth-year structured teams were in place this year, they would have probably been on the PeeWee 4s. There would have been a big discrepancy of talent between who they played against in the Valley League and in the states. I think the teams should continue to be organized by ability or you will see a lot of kids move to club teams, which will ultimately weaken the program. We have met many great families and made great friendships through the years at AHA. We have primarily stayed with the same group of kids based on ability, and it's fun to reunite with older / younger kids every other year. We value the relationships we've made, but our primary objective is the competitive hockey. Good idea for the in-house leagues, but not for the rest of the (travel) program.