



Basic Structure for 8U Mite Practices

The 8U Mite group consists of players ranging in age from 6 to 8 years old. This assumes that the players have first followed USA Hockey recommendations and taken a basic learn to skate and learn to play program. These two foundational programs will provide the rudimentary skills needed to for the 8U program. In the case of some smaller youth association it may be necessary to group the 6U or even the 10U players into practice sessions. This can still be done efficiently with proper planning and be very beneficial to all involved.

Skating is a primary skill for ice hockey and although players must continue to master skating technique throughout their career, there must be a special emphasis place on the ABC elements of skating in the early years of development. Players at the Mite age have a harder time processing technical skills instruction and their bodies lack some of the fine motor control required. At this age large muscle groups and multiple joint movements should be incorporated into the practice sessions. Agility, balance and coordination (A, B, C's) on the ice surface are at the foundation of LTAD for Mites.

Practices have a preparatory phase followed by the main body of the practice. The main body of the practice session includes station work so that kids are developing their skills in an efficient manner. The recommended breakdown is with six stations so that there is enough variety to hold the interest of players at this age. Training should be structured so that a large part of the skill repetition is done in a games format. Players at all levels must be mentally engaged in order best acquire new skills. When skills repetition lacks an emotional element, children at this age quickly become bored. If the skills repetition is hidden in the form of a game, children are capable of extended periods of focused effort. Play is the key to emotional engagement in the skills repetition.

The six station format should include the following breakdown:

- 1 station is of ABC's
- 1 station of hockey competition, 1v1, 2v2, 3v3, or 4v4
- 1 station is on puck control skills
- 1 station is of passing/shooting skills
- 2 stations are devoted to specifically skating skills

Out of these six stations, two to three at least should be in a games format.

Coaches also need to be mindful of the costs associated with quality ice time for the players and must always strive to maximize the learning environment. Keep explanation, demonstration and setup time to a minimum. The goal is to have the players actively participating in a drill within one minute of station rotation. This is not easy to do so preparation is a key. If you can divide setup and explanation time between multiple coaches, two jobs will get done in half the time.

The basic 8U Mite practice structure is for a 50 minute hour block of ice as this is common across the country (50 minutes of ice with the cost of a 10 minute ice cut included). If your local associating gets the full 60 minutes out of their hour block of ice the practice sessions are easily modified by adding one additional minute to each station and four minutes to the game activity at the conclusion of practice.

It is a good practice to repeat one of the prescribed ice sessions twice in a row. Kids at this age like familiarity with the drills, the repetition is good and it helps the overall efficiency of the session. It is easier for the coaches the second time through.

At the 8U Mite age group, USA Hockey doesn't recommend full time goalies. Every player at this age needs to build a foundation of agility, balance and coordination on the ice surface. We recommend that teams rotate every player through the goaltender position to help kids discover if that position is truly for them. Goaltending requires a high degree of athleticism to be successful. If an 8U player has demonstrated a good on-ice foundation in the ABC's and skating skills and has a passion for the position, it is acceptable to allow that player to play more regular in net.

During the practice sessions the goalies should only play goal when they rotate to a station that has a net. Goalies should continue to rotate with their team as the group advances through the stations. The goalies should continue to skate and be active in every drill.

When no goalie is present for a station, the coaches can tip the net over to provide a low to mid range target for the player to shot at or small nets can be used if available.