

Too Much Hockey?

When is too much Hockey too much?

It's that time again... Minor Hockey Week across Canada. Hockey like no other sport unites Canadians. Minor Hockey engages and preoccupies hundreds of thousands of volunteer coaches, administrators, and parents; whose dedication and love for the sport make the game so special and unique in Canada.

However, in today's hockey circles, the discussion and often debate arise... whether kids are playing too much hockey... when is too much... too much? My opinion, it depends on the individual child.

The Pros play or train 11 months of the year... it's a year round commitment for the elite. Over the past decade the minor hockey system has evolved into a year round affair for many players and families as well.

According to a 2002 Alberta Hockey Now newspaper survey, 21 percent of players would never stop playing hockey... and over 68 percent would be active in the Spring and Summer months... since there are approximately 12,000 Calgary minor hockey players there appears an ongoing demand for hockey development. I make my living conducting hockey programs for ages 5 to 65+. My hockey business has grown into a year round vocation. However, I am not in the hockey business for the money; to retire rich at an early age in the Bahamas! If my motives related to the Canadian Loonie, I would be working in the corporate world... a real estate agent or a professional trader in the financial markets, etc. Rather, I love the game and my childhood dream has always been to make a living in our great game. It's a lifestyle for Rex, the coach and businessman. I often say to kids I am instructing on the ice, "one of my favorite places to hang out is the hockey rink". I truly enjoy teaching players of all ages who love the game and wish to improve their skating and hockey skills.

As a kid growing up in rural Newfoundland, I developed a true passion for the game... often skating and playing shinny on a nearby pond from the early hours of the morning until it became too dark to see the puck... 6 or 7 hours straight on many occasions! While growing up, I couldn't get enough of the sport!

Today's kids can find artificial ice to play on year round. Hockey schools and conditioning camps are numerous in August prior to September tryouts. The minor hockey season runs from September to March. Christmas, Easter, and Spring tournaments, 3 on 3 pond hockey leagues, numerous power skating and hockey skills development programs as well operate throughout the year. Often parents are signing their kids up for various hockey programs and tournaments but the kids don't seem enthusiastic about participating.

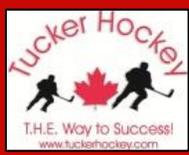
Today, some parents are living their hockey dreams through their children and invest too much emotionally into the sport. As well, parents often buy the best equipment for their 10 year old child such as \$500 top of the line skates and \$275 graphite sticks. Good equipment is a necessity... but the love of the game, a dedication to improve one's hockey skills and a certain amount of god given natural ability are the keys to excelling! When growing up, children should try other sports such as soccer, swimming, etc. to discover which sport they truly excel at and enjoy the best.

Too much of a good thing? Training and playing can be overdone. Today's kids are playing too many intense hockey games per season... often at the early age levels... tyke, novice and atom; the game is too structured. Some teams playing close to 100 games per year! When is too much hockey too much?

Relax, it's only a game... let's have some fun and develop the fundamentals. Let's not worry about winning and losing at this early childhood age.

Symptoms of over training / playing are lethargy in performance / interest (a player doesn't feel enthusiastic about going to the rink), stress type injuries (the child often feels tired... run down... frequent colds... fatigue can be mental as well as physical) and staleness in improvement (the desire on the ice has decreased... play seems to have leveled off).

It's important for any athlete to listen to his or her body to avoid over training and over playing. Equally it's important for each parent to listen to their child... everyone is different regarding their desire to play the game. Good luck with your hockey. Have fun and enjoy the game and Minor Hockey Week!



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Food for Thought:

If you place too much water on a plant it will not grow and fully blossom... too much of anything can be bad... when is too much hockey too much? That is the question for each child and especially their parents to discuss together and answer throughout the calendar year.

Yours in Hockey,
Coach Rex