

Northern Plains Hockey

Coaching Newsletter

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PeeWee Checking Proposal

I'm pretty sure most people involved with hockey in the United States are aware at some level or another that USA Hockey has a proposal on the table that would take body checking as we currently know it out of the peewee level. I believe there are also a lot of misconceptions related to what this new proposal will really change. I hope we can all have discussions about this proposal over the next few weeks- but are able to do so with the facts of the proposal rather than hearsay.

The major misconception of the proposal is that body checking is being taken out of the peewee level. While the proposed change may give that impression, the reality is that the proposal really redefines what is acceptable body contact at the peewee level and what is not acceptable. Not all of the body checking that is allowed at the bantam level will be allowed at the peewee level, thus the reason that body checking is no longer the acceptable term for body contact at the peewee level. After having read the proposal and a lot of the related material, it is my interpretation that the body contact that will not be allowed under this proposal includes open-ice hits and the big hits along the boards.

So the proposal does take some of the body checking out of the peewee game, but really encourages body contact in many areas of the ice. I really believe the proposers of this change are adamant that body contact should occur in peewee games- it just needs to fit the new level of acceptability. As coaches of peewee teams, we should be expecting to spend time in each practice teaching our players all of the skills related to making contact with an opponent and receiving contact. USA Hockey has put out a lot of excellent material related to body checking and body contact- I just wonder how much has been used on a consistent basis. If we fail to take advantage of these 2 years to improve each player's body contact skills then we have not fulfilled one of our responsibilities- the responsibility to maximize a player's skills in a variety of areas- in this case the skills related to the physical part of the game. This has to be part of the change!

I also really believe that the development of the ADM has led us to this proposal. As the developers of the ADM did their work, they learned that the prime ages for skill development are roughly 9-12 years old. The obvious question became, "Is the development of skill for some players in this age-group being hindered because of body checking?" Do some 11 and 12-year olds become discouraged from

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handling the puck or battling for the puck because of body checking? If 9-12 is the prime window of opportunity for skill development and skill acquisition, then it seems that redefining the acceptable level of body contact should allow puck skills and physical skills to prosper long-term if taught properly at the peewee level. Redefining the acceptable level of body contact should help create an environment where skill development of all players improves. Remember, this development will be very beneficial long-term. What we do right at the ages of 11 and 12 will really benefit each of those players at the ages of 17, 18, 19, and 20.

Another factor that cannot be ignored is where do concussions fit into this proposal? While the medical profession is continually gathering data and information related to concussions, what is known about concussions continues to improve. One fact that every 30, 40, and 50-year old should know when designing a hockey program for kid is that the brain of a 2-year old is more susceptible to a concussion than that of an adult. We can't continue to allow the same levels of contact simply because that is what we have always done. As our knowledge improves, we have to use that knowledge to reassess areas of our great game.

If redefining the acceptable level of body contact at the peewee level allows young players a better opportunity to acquire and improve skills in an environment that is safer for all 11 and 12-year olds, shouldn't that be enough for all of us to make the game better for our youth. If you are skeptical of this change, don't think you are any different than many of the people who today are the some of the biggest supporters of this proposal. Many of the staunchest supporters weren't real excited about the idea of taking checking out of the peewee game. However, after reviewing the skill-acquisition window, the safety factor related to concussions, and the opportunity to improve the body contact skills, many early skeptics changed their stance on this proposal.

Please take the time to discuss this proposal within your association and with other coaches in your area. Don't allow the facts to not be put on the table. Let's do our best to educate the people in our associations! If you have questions related to this proposal or anything else, please feel free to contact me.

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