



2025-26 Club Updates and Points of Emphasis

The Tri-City Eagles are very excited to announce the following updates as well as points of emphasis for the 2025-26 season! We take pride in constantly seeking creative opportunities to improve the experience of players, teams, and the club alike.

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UPDATES

Skill Development and Practice Scheduling

In the past, Travel Teams have received two weekly practices and an additional, rotating “skills practice” that occurred anywhere from every other week to once a month. While the premise for having these skill sessions is sound, application has proven less than ideal. Attendance has been a concern and feedback shows that it is a challenge for families to dedicate a 3rd weeknight at the rink, especially when you add in any Whitey’s Pond and high school hockey. From the club’s perspective, any lack of attendance is a missed development opportunity. We’ve also found it difficult to create a skill development plan that is consistent and builds upon itself given the infrequent nature of how these skill sessions have been scheduled.

Therefore, we are removing the rotational skill practices in favor of elongating regularly scheduled team practices by 10-20 minutes each. The extended team practice times allows us to address skill-specific training into practice plans. This change creates:

- a better teaching/feedback environment. Rather than the 3-4 teams on ice for skill practices, only two teams will be scheduled giving both players and coaches a better learning environment. Think lowering the student to teacher ratio.
- Skill-specific instruction will now take place on a weekly basis. This allows us to build a skill development plan that builds upon itself as well as providing coaches with useful time to address team specifics
- Improved attendance, therefore higher participation in skill training, resulting in more thorough development, which will directly impact club growth and competitiveness.
- Improved goaltender skill development. Having only 2 teams on the ice allows for much more space that can be dedicated to the goaltender position. I affectionately call it "Goalie Land." Coupled with the improvements we're making to our Goaltender Development Plan in general (see below), we're excited to see the results.
- Increasing efficiency of your time. By elongating practices, we are improving the ratio of time spent in the car vs. time spent on the ice. Not a groundbreaking swing there but it does reduce the number of necessary weekly trips which I believe to be useful for any family.

Some additional notes regarding schedule:

- Travel Teams will continue the standard of 2 weekly practices with exceptions for holidays and unique events.

(Exception: See "Updated Midget Model" below)

- Clarified and reemphasized attendance expectations (see below)
- Teams will continue to receive rotational Whitey's Pond practices (weather dependent)
- Please be aware that these updates create some scheduling nuances, potentially resulting in some teams using different days of the week from previous years, to include Monday through Friday. As an example, all 12U Youth Travel teams practices had a Tuesday/Thursday practice pattern last year and that pattern (and all patterns) are subject to change in 2025-26.

Updated Youth Midget Model

This is a significant update that takes place following hours of discussion, brainstorming, research, and planning followed by a decision that is not made lightly. Ultimately, we believe this is in the best of interest of our players' mental and physical health, as well as their development as hockey players and young adults.

- From season start to Thanksgiving, **ALL** Youth 16U and 18U teams will follow a standard schedule of two weekly practices, to include the aforementioned practice updates.
- From Thanksgiving to season end, **ALL** Youth 16U and 18U teams will have one mandatory 80-minute full ice practice per week supplemented by an optional second practice intended for skill development for multiple teams.

This is obviously a response to the challenging dynamic of simultaneous club and high school hockey seasons. For anyone who has gone through a full season playing both, it is an unapologetic grind, especially during the darker, colder winter months. Nonetheless, most

players love their high school experience. Whether public or private, a strong majority of players are highly motivated and inspired to represent their academic institutions. However, with increased high school scheduling, it has become much more difficult to remain healthy. The physical, emotional, and mental strain can contribute to injuries, illness, loss of interest, lack of attendance, decreased morale, reduced performance, etc., all factors which directly impact the growth and experience of the individual, the team, and the club.

With only a single mandatory team practice per week post-Thanksgiving, attendance expectations will be heightened.

Ultimately, this decision comes down to creating a more mindful, efficient, and beneficial experience for our players. Personally, it was very disheartening to observe practices last season with less than half of the players present. While we cannot control every contributing factor for absences, we can evaluate and build a schedule that is appropriate, mindful, and reasonable for the benefit of our players and teams.

It is worth noting that a model very similar was employed by the Tri-City Eagles prior to 2020 with great success, both in process and result. The model was reverted back to a standardized full season scheduled during and after the pandemic to provide more opportunities for people eager to fill their schedules. Now, with high school hockey back in full swing and growing, it makes sense to bring back this modified model for all Youth 16U and 18U teams.

Additional notes:

- As a Core Value, we place a premium on Commitment and want to hold our players accountable. We believe we now have an improved system that establishes more realistic, appropriate, and mindful expectations. It is our goal to set our young people up for success and this is a step in that direction.
- We are aware that some players do not play high school hockey or have a very limited schedule. Although those situations are minimal, we like the optional skill practice session partnered with the elongated team practice. Players will still have opportunities to improve themselves but without the pressure of mandatory events.
- Girls 16U/19U teams will continue with two weekly practices for the entire season. While more and more girls are playing high school hockey, whether co-ed or girls, the numbers are not as high as the youth players, thus our decision not to alter the Girls Travel 16U/19U model

Club Wide System and Development Model

For the last few seasons, efforts have been made to create a plan in which all teams will operate under similar expectations in regards to style and tactics. We are now prepared to install these expectations across all levels of the club. With that there may be some differences to what you've seen taught previously. Our goal is to establish an identity that can be introduced at the youngest ages and developed every step of the way. This probably won't be a night and day difference from previous years but it is important to share our process and goals.

Over the last decade plus, USA Hockey has invested significant resources towards player skill development. We see this primarily in the focused training of their coaches. Aside from teaching someone how to skate, USA Hockey has done a tremendous job of teaching, supporting, and putting tools in hands to the point that even a beginner can learn how to coach

young players. And the players have benefited greatly. The skill level of players today is significantly higher than just 15-20 years ago. That being said, I do believe that the understanding of “how” to play the game is not where it once was. As a kid, I watched as many NHL games as I could, from start to finish. Unfortunately, most players don’t do that anymore in favor of catching highlights in short clips. Partner that with a heavy emphasis on skill over everything and the result is players who lack a quality understanding of how to play the game. Essentially, we’re viewing a connected “Way” to play hockey as a skill in and of itself, one which must be developed like skating, stickhandling, and shooting. By using a club wide approach in teaching a “Way” to play, we believe our players will become more decisive and connected from year to year. This is by no means a claim that our “Way” is the best or superior to another style, but it will establish an environment of team cohesion, connection, and therefore, more success. And taking the approach that learning a “Way” to play is a skill, this will also better prepare our players for future opportunities.

POINTS OF EMPHASIS

Attendance

We also want to reinforce the importance of one of our Core Values: Commitment. We need to make it clear that every scheduled event is mandatory. Attendance is essential to building a positive experience for both the team and the player. At the end of the day, our goal to develop young people of quality starts with being present. Making a commitment and following through, despite obstacles, has great value in the long game of life.

Per our club rules, absences are only excused for illness, injury, emergencies, and approved direct conflicts. Note that “direct conflict” is defined as the inability for an individual to physically be in two places at the same time. As an example, barring extreme circumstances, a local high school game ending at 5:30pm is not a direct conflict for a 9pm practice.

All absences must be communicated directly with your coach and/or team manager (through their preferred medium) as far in advance as possible. As an example, make your coach aware of any potential conflicts even before the season schedule is released.

List of Approved Direct Conflict Absences:

- religious holidays
- planned family obligations
- graded academic assignments (e.g., graded musical performances)
 - note that upcoming graded assignments (tests, projects, exams) do not qualify
- high school games that directly conflict with practice
 - note that high school games that directly conflict with Tri-City games are not excused

Our goal here is not to make hockey the most important thing in your life. Being a Tri-City Eagles does not have to make your top 10 list. What we are asking is that you put a priority on this commitment and see it through. We believe teaching this value is essential in quality youth formation. Learning commitment is not meant to be easy and must be nurtured. The development of our youth is a task that takes a village. When it comes to making a commitment

to play on any of our travel teams, we are asking you to make a mindful decision to be a positive influence in this endeavor.

National Tournament Bound (NTB) Teams

Members of NTB teams are required to participate in all events of the USA Hockey National Tournament process. NTB teams must qualify for each step of this process based on season results; participation in these events is not guaranteed. Only teams declared as NTB are eligible to participate. Dates will be provided as soon as they are available.

For Girls:

- PVAHA Girls Tier II Affiliate Playoffs (local)
- Southeast District Girls Tier II Playoffs (Carolina)
- Girls Tier II National Tournament, March 24-29, 2026
 - 14U = Rochester, MN
 - 16U = St. Louis, MO
 - 19U = Rockland, MA

For Youth

- PVAHA Youth Tier II State Playoffs (local)
- Youth Tier II National Tournament, March 24-29, 2026
 - 14U = Dallas, TX
 - 16U = Irvine, CA
 - 18U = West Chester, PA

Accepting a roster position spot on an NTB team is an agreement to attend all qualified events in the USA Hockey National Tournament process.

Player Movement

Please be aware that player movement between rosters:

- must take place prior to January 1st
- must be agreed upon by both the club and member

For movement to a higher competitive level:

- must be initiated by the club
- requests will not be accepted nor tolerated

For movement to a lower competitive level:

- discussion can be initiated by club or member
- member requests are to be sent to hockey director
- must be agreed upon by both parties

Note that player movement is entirely separate from disciplinary issues.

This is intended only to clarify expectations. Historically, player movement between rosters has not been explored/entertained due to the fact that any movement impacts two teams. In situations of upward movement, it is likely that one team's stronger players would be departing, something that can impact future results for that team. Our message here is that we are always evaluating creative opportunities for players, teams, and the club itself. The expectation is that any alterations should be met with a "next man up" mentality and a new opportunity.

Tryout Preparation

Now that the tryout weekend is upon us, the physical side of preparation is complete. Hopefully you have taken care of your conditioning and your body is ready to perform. This section is an encouragement to prepare mentally and emotionally for the days ahead.

- 1) Be yourself. Take time to consider the best parts of your game. Make sure that every evaluator is able to clearly recognize your strengths. Know what you do well and do them often. Don't try to be a different kind of player than you already are. There is a reason why every player on a team is different from the next.
- 2) Visualize success. Begin preparing yourself by imagining doing the things that make you a competitive hockey player.
- 3) Be positive, stay positive. Even when things might not appear to be going well, fight through and show the resiliency to perform even in a tough situation. Some players will have a difficult weekend with things not going their way. This happens. Find a way to showcase toughness by fighting through the adversity.
- 4) Control your controllables. In hockey, as in life, you can control only two things: your attitude and your effort. Nothing else. You do not get to control who attends tryouts, who doesn't, what the evaluators prefer, what they see, nor what they don't see. Those who make decisions make mistakes. Professional scouts, coaches, and managers are paid millions of dollars and receive years of information and still make the wrong decisions when it comes to drafting, trading, and evaluating players. How likely is it then for a local youth travel organization to make an incorrect decision? You could have the tryout of your life and still not make the team you wanted. This happens in tryouts and it happens in life.

Be sure to give perfect attitude and perfect effort throughout the weekend and regardless of the results, you'll be able to look yourself in the mirror with pride.

Parents, be sure to discuss the possibilities that exist for your player ahead of time. What happens when we don't make the team we had hoped? What happens if we do? What happens if we don't make a team at all? None of these decisions, whether in your favor or not, define you. Your definition as a player and as a person is how you react and respond. Remember that you can only control your attitude and your effort,

understanding that in the end, that might not be enough to get what you want. Again, that's part of life. But, taking the time to discuss the emotions you might experience in advance will better prepare you to handle them.

Good luck to you all!