

Part

1

A new philosophy of coaching  
hockey.



Japan Hockey Association

A NEW PHILOSOPHY OF COACHING HOCKEY

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It is widely known that the contents of the training program, the expertise and experience of the coaches with children, the social life in the club or school, as well as the structure of the formative competitions determine to a high degree whether young players choose hockey as their lifetime sport.

The art of developing effective training and competitive programs for children lies in knowing which kind of practice and competition the player is ready for at any given stage of his or her physical and mental development. **Children will only learn quickly, effectively and thoroughly when the demands of the training sessions or the competitions match their intellectual, psychological, and motor skills.**

The concept of readiness (the disposition of a certain degree of maturity) is a prerequisite for any activity and should therefore be applied in all aspects of teaching and learning. Before a child is admitted to school, teachers ask themselves whether that child is ready or mature enough to attend school or whether he or she is prepared to benefit from the teaching process. Teachers determine if the child can successfully meet the challenge of the first school year or if it would be better to let that child mature for one more year with activities that are better suited to his or her mental and physical condition.

The question of maturity is also important in the matter of motor learning. Regardless of the action, adults must determine the age at which there are certain guarantees that the child can achieve that objective. Before teaching a child to ride a bike, for example, you must first ask when children generally acquire the capacity to maintain equilibrium on only two wheels. Experience has shown us that any attempt to do so before the child is ready (before about four years of age) will fail because nature has not yet provided the means of coordination and balance.

**The concept of readiness must also be applied to children's sports activities.** The question coaches should ask is: At what age is a child ready to successfully face the demands of an adult-competition? If one sport or federation had been aware of the concept of readiness, children under 14 in our soccer, handball, rugby, or hockey clubs would never have been subjected, at such an early stage, to test themselves in competitions for which they are not yet qualified, prepared, or simply ready. Children need to be exposed to a gradual stimulation in training and to a series of progressive competitions that, over the years, allow them to grow step by step without any hurry into the adult game.

*"There is little to be gained, and much to be lost, by attempting to force young players into the full game before they are physiologically, biomechanically and cognitively ready for the activity. One of the fundamental goals of teaching is to ensure that every player has a high level of success. Therefore we need to assess the development readiness of the players in each age group"*

DAVID HEMERY in "The pursuit of sporting excellence"

**The art of teaching lies in knowing for what activity** (a technical move, a tactical behavior or a complex competition) **the player is prepared for at a particular stage of physical and mental development.**



**Unfortunately, it is the force of habit that constitutes the greatest obstacle to progress in youth hockey.** Traditional methods are often followed blindly without giving sufficient thought of the consequences, both in training as well as in the structuring of the youth competitions.

In order to move past these obstacles and achieve better results in the future, coaches, administrations, and federations must first review the structure and organization of their youth-soccer programs. The complicated adult game has to be simplified until a logical progression of competitions with gradual increasing demands is designed that adapts perfectly to the actual mental and physical abilities and capacities of the child. A child should be presented with only those exercises, games, and challenges that suit their current abilities, interests, and expectations. **The training program as well as the competitions for children should be like their shoes. They should fit perfectly in order to feel comfortable.**

If we are to improve the development of young players, it is crucial that we recognize the mistakes made in the past. **Awareness of these errors is the first step towards more effective training and learning methods.**

*"When you don't know where to go, it doesn't matter which road you choose"*

## Natural development of young players

All things in nature have a gestation period and must go through their proper stages to be formed. Each human being has to pass through different stages of development before finally reaching maturity. Nature does not take shortcuts; there is a natural, unhurried order to it all.

Coaches, players, parents, and administrators should copy the wisdom of nature. Being impatient and hurrying the development of a young soccer player in the teaching and learning processes frequently results in poor performances among older players who had shown promise when they were younger. What coaches need is a training plan or model they can perfectly tailor to fit their players' varying cognitive and motor abilities.



To work with, not against, the developing mind and body of individuals, all youth hockey competitions and training programs must respect the laws of nature and take into account the actual mental and physical condition of their young participants. As children mature, the games in which they compete should gradually become more difficult and complex. **In a well-structured scheme, young soccer players grow at the same rate as their competitions grow in complexity and difficulty.**

## CURRENT COACHING PRACTICES

Most players, no matter their nationality, don't know how to tap into or make use of their potential, which remains unused and dormant. Sadly, the best coaches do not work at the grass roots level because coaching young players rarely reaps them any economic gain. Coaches with greater knowledge and experience are attracted instead to senior teams that can afford to provide them higher salaries.

This failure to attract well-qualified coaches means that young players in schools and clubs are exposed to poor quality and tedious instruction. In most cases, children are coached in the same way that adults are instructed, without taking into account the natural order or progressive development of the young player through time. The makeshift or haphazard schemes that most coaches adopt do not solve the delicate problem of assuring young players quality coaching. Moreover, coaching youth at the initial stages is too important for the future development of the players to allow coaches to hastily assemble idiosyncratic methods of training.



*“Nature decrees that children should be children before they become adults. If we try to alter this natural order, we will reach adulthood prematurely but with neither substance nor strength”.*

Jean J. Rousseau

## INTRODUCING COMPLEX ACTIVITIES TOO SOON

One problem with most methods of training and competition is that they employ complex games and playing situations before children are ready for them. Even hockey players competing at the club level generally fail one out of three plays, so we must admit that hockey is a complicated game. Research has shown, generally speaking, that the younger the player, the higher the percentage of failure in competition. A low success rate (fewer than 50 percent of successful actions) is observed when beginners between eight and nine years of age compete with only six players on a team (6 on 6). Players face countless difficulties and complex problems even in a game played with this pared-down team. In competition with 11 players on a team, as still happens in many parts of the world, it was noticed that one team lost the possession of the ball four to six times in just one minute's play (i.e., effectively 40 seconds' playing time)!

Young players should not be blamed for incurring this high percentage of unsuccessful actions. We must realize that all children fail frequently, not only in hockey but also in other physical and mental activities, if they are not brought gradually and progressively to the task. In today's training and competition, children are asked to face game situations that are simply beyond their limits or scope at that particular stage of their psychomotor development. Subjecting children to too complex activities before they're ready only reinforces failure and frustration. When individuals experience frequent failure, they not only lose interest and self-esteem but may also come to feel incapable of facing situations that, in fact, are far too difficult and complex for them at the time. Stress and dropping out may result.

## DEMANDING TOO MUCH OF YOUNG PLAYERS

Young players struggle not only to overcome the complexity of the game but also the increasing demands placed on them within a limited amount of practice time and personal attention. It challenges both the coaches and players that ever more children are becoming involved in hockey—but with less time and space available to them. **Teaching or learning hockey, as well as competing in it, the traditional way does not sufficiently stimulate the bodies and minds of young players, and much of their talent is left undiscovered.**

Playing the ball for a maximum of 70 seconds in a full match or being active for fewer than 15 minutes of a 90-minute training session doesn't allow players to develop their full potential. Yet players are still expected and pressured to perform at a high level. This puts an ever-increasing demand on the youngsters' physical and mental abilities and capacities.

*"Tomorrow's success is founded on today's preparation"*

Osler

## USING INEFFICIENT COACHING METHODS

Consider this: many children study a foreign language over the course of eight years in school. If the youth then travel to a country where their mother language is not spoken, however, they are frequently unable to apply the knowledge they have acquired in almost a thousand hours of teaching and learning. Likewise, I believe, most recently graduated physical education teachers, after studying four years of different sport sciences in a physical education department of a university, still cannot resolve the majority of the innumerable problems they encounter during their first physical education lessons. I think this is due to having had insufficient practical applications of their studies and insufficient experience—and then having applied methods that are already out of date. The knowledge gained at universities or in national training centers has helped few coaches to confront the challenges of their profession with success.

To be up to date and make use of the new information (most of which tends to repeat itself about every two decades), physical education teachers (and especially those who coach future teachers) should actualize and constantly augment their knowledge and capacities to help their students learn the latest innovations of their specialization.

The major obstacle for the progress of coaching in hockey is the strength of ease and comfort. **Because of their own inertia or sluggishness, coaches tend to continue with old habits rather than continually rethinking what has to be done and how.** All too often information is used and exercises and formative programs are applied that have already lost their validity. Many have not even noticed that the information they obtained years before has already diminished in value.

Few coaches look beyond their specialty and combine, mix, or synthesize the knowledge from diverse but related sports sciences with the teaching and learning process. Consequently, the majority of players and coaches must continue learning from accidents, mistakes, and trials rather than from the instruction received.

Before teaching a specific sport like hockey, coaches should fully understand how a child, adolescent, or adult learns best and analyze the mechanisms that intervene and influence learning in each of the evolutionary stages of the student. As the young hockey player grows and develops, a great variety of physiological, cognitive, and social-emotional changes occur that directly affect the acquisition of coordination and conditional, as well as mental, capacities.

*“The tragedy of coaching young players focuses on the fact that many coaches may know a lot about the game, but they don't know their young pupils.”*

## TEN RULES FOR LEARNING EFFICIENCY

1. **Acquire good habits.** Bad habits double the amount of work for the coach, because he she must first suppress the incorrect habit and then teach the student to react correctly to the same stimulus. Just as one can learn to speak a language well or badly, one can also acquire good or bad habits and behaviors in hockey.
2. **Confront players with problems that are within their capabilities**—and also with slightly more complex and difficult activities that, after a certain number of trials, can be mastered without help from the coach. A feeling of capability and success generally nourishes and stimulates learning. When players are aware of their capability and **receive some kind of reward for their success**, learning will be fun and players will be encouraged to progress even further.
3. **Help players learn to recognize the result of every play immediately after the action is over.** Players who are conscious of the results of their play in a given game situation will be capable of later reproducing or suppressing the vivid experience in a similar game situation.
4. Teach new aspects of the game within the parameters of ones that are already known. **People tend to learn more quickly when they already partially know the abilities and capacities that the coach is trying to develop.**
5. Practice the individual elements of a situation to connect the stimulus and response. **The first phase of learning is to recognize a game situation that is composed of various elements.** To better recognize a situation, it's important to practice it many times. Apart from facilitating recognition of a situation, the repetitions tend to strengthen the connection between the stimuli and the correct answer.
6. Review and repeat material frequently. Because the loss of an ability or capacity starts right after the practice, **repetition is vital to learning.** A few repetitions succeed in activating only short-term memory. **Transferring information to long-term memory requires repetitions of the same task, in the event these tasks will be varied by the coach on more than two occasions, in more than two training sessions.**





7. Vary the exercises and games. Without varying the content of a practice, you risk boring players. **To avoid monotony, loss of concentration, and lack of motivation in the players—all enemies of learning—the coach must ensure variety in the session.**



**8.** Mix up the flow of content. The more similar the content of different parts of a training session, the higher the interference becomes between them. This is because the last thing learned is frequently superimposed on what was previously learned. **Remaining on the same theme or method of presentation of the content for even 15 to 20 minutes can lower players' concentration and interest.**

**9.** Motivate your pupils and players, be it through praise or a choice of activities that interests them. **Motivation supports learning.**

**10.** Stimulate both the body and the whole mind. Bulgarian scientist Lozanov discovered a “super learning” method in the 1970s: maximum learning occurs when teachers use an activity to stimulate **both the left and right hemispheres of the brain.** Hockey's traditional teaching methods often fail to adequately stimulate the right hemisphere of the brain, which harbors the creative capacities, intuition, and space and time orientation. Each training session should stimulate the body as well as both hemispheres of the brain.

## TIME FOR A CHANGE!

What should coaches do in these days of increasingly sedentary and easy living habits? People generally do less and less physical exercise. After 8 to 10 hours' rest overnight, children often sit for 6 more hours in school, which they reach by (sitting in a) bus or car. In the afternoon, having sat down for lunch and more schooling, they may travel by bus or car to practice their favorite sport, where they mostly stand in line waiting for their turn, listening to the coach's instructions. Then they return home to watch TV, search the internet, or play video games. Relatively few minutes of the day are reserved for physical stimuli or allowing them to use their creativity, imagination, and initiative. Under these conditions, **the entire tradition of coaching must be rethought and carefully revised to give players a more "hands on" role in their own education.**

When deciding exactly what role children should be assigned, coaches must consider the physical and emotional needs of the youngsters. They must also understand the stages of development **to know at what age children are ready for certain activities.** By considering all of this, coaches can provide a nonstressful, fun, and effective soccer program.



## PROMOTING ACTIVE PARTICIPATION

Rather than adhering to current hockey programs that concentrate on the execution of different skills, the modern coach should teach pupils to understand all aspects of the game. **Too much drill will kill** the young players' innate potential! Over time coaches should carefully and progressively develop important capacities, including perception, analysis of game situations, and correct decision making under stressful conditions.

*"The natural order accounts for a progressive development through time"*



Yet a coach cannot foster these qualities through verbal instruction alone. When coaches continually use verbal instruction, they become the main actors in the coaching theater, thereby curtailing or even killing the active participation of the players. Usurping the active role is detrimental to the players' effective learning. By involving the players, on the other hand, a coach obliges *them* to think, to collect information, to organize the collected information and come to conclusions, to evaluate and judge, to imagine, invent, and create new moves or combinations.

In *Coaching of Performance* John Whitmore wrote that a pupil only remembers 19 percent of what the teacher taught him or her some three months ago through instructing or telling, whereas he can recall 32 percent of what was demonstrated and explained. Yet in cases where pupils were given the opportunity to generate the information on their own, but with the help of a teacher, fully 65 percent of the information was memorized.

That is why hockey players should be allowed to actively participate in the coaching and learning process: to develop as complete athletes who eventually become independent from the frequent instruction of coaches. **Learning takes place best when the coach is able to transfer decisions to the pupils.**

## ALLOWING CHILDREN MORE CONTROL

Creativity can be considered one of a human being's most elevated mental activities. Unfortunately, few coaches know how to stimulate this ability in their players. The teaching styles and rigid methods seen on most hockey fields tend to strangle more than stimulate the players' capacity of fantasy, creativity, and innovation.

*"Youth prefer to be stimulated instead of being instructed."*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

During training, instead of giving young children sufficient opportunities to cultivate their innate potential, coaches tend to dominate everything, fearful of losing control of the situation by giving up any control to the players. **A coach's objective should be to make the others think, instead of thinking for them.**

Expert coaches with a wealth of technical knowledge often have a hard time withholding their expertise. They are used to giving away their knowledge through many instructions about what, when, and how to do the task, without being aware that coaching this way will limit their pupils' formation. Giving the players solutions to "remember" should be replaced by presenting them with tailor-made problems that they have to **resolve on their own.**

## STIMULATING PLAYERS' MINDS

To develop players' active involvement in the training and learning process, coaches must master the skill of posing questions. The most effective questions are open ones that require descriptive answers. In contrast, closed questions with "yes" or "no" answers shut the door on the exploration of further detail. That is why coaches should concentrate on open questions, ones that begin with words that seek to quantify or gather facts: **what, when, how much, or how many.**

Through systematic questioning by the coach the pupils are self-generating the information. Thanks to intelligent questions, many players become aware of problems they have never noticed before. Facing them, players have to think, examine, judge, and evaluate until they find solutions to the problems presented by the coach. On the contrary, when a coach instructs or just tells players what to do in certain moments or situations of the game, he or she does not stimulate any of these active mental processes.

Once hockey coaches have been convinced of the need to modify the traditional way of teaching their players, they soon discover that **the process of understanding and learning hockey will shift increasingly to self-teaching.**



*"To tell denies or negates another's intelligence; to ask honors it. Questions generate awareness and also responsibility"*

J. Whitmore

## MEETING YOUNG PEOPLE'S NEEDS

The key to developing successful youth soccer players is in understanding and meeting the needs of young players, rather than subjecting them to boring exercises or a game designed for adults. These are some basic, yet important, needs children have that coaches should always keep in mind.

**Need for security.** During training children need a familiar and intimate atmosphere that gives them security and confidence. It's not recommended to frequently change the training site nor the coach or educator. Returning to games that they are already familiar with (but meeting variations of them) is welcomed by the kids so long as the contents of the training sessions link with something that they already know. The children demand stable relations. Training should always take place in a safe environment, and specific rules should be applied to ensure safety and avoid through specific rules (for instance no hitting with lifting the stick from the ground is allowed for the players less than 10 years) any dangerous situations.

**Need for new experiences.** Nothing can be understood completely as long as it has not been experienced. Coaches should allow the children to experiment with tasks. Children need to discover on their own everything that surrounds them. This also applies to the world of sports and in particular to soccer. Kids should be stimulated with games and activities that are within their physical and mental capacities. This method of coaching allows them to develop their abilities and capacities step by step through their own discovery.

**Need to be acknowledged.** Children get highly motivated when tribute is paid to their efforts in mastering a skill or problem. Through praise they are encouraged to try even harder. To children younger than 12 years old, the teacher, coach, or parent is like a mirror in which they see their capacity or incapacity. That is why educators and parents have to learn to be positive, to praise the children frequently and keep critical comments to a minimum.

**Need to show responsibility.** Children prefer to do things on their own without depending too much on adults. They like to reach independence as quickly as possible. The coaching methods and behavior of the educator should consider this need, making sure that the children are frequently allowed to find solutions on their own to problems the coach presents. The educator should interfere only when the problems can't be solved by the pupils.

Youngsters can also perform the tasks of putting down or collecting cones, modifying the rules of a practice game, or choosing players for demonstrations or certain activities. Their need to demonstrate responsibility can also be stimulated in each training session by allowing them 10 minutes in which to freely choose what to practice, how to do it, and where and with whom to execute a determined skill or game.

Coaches who are reluctant to give up some of the responsibility to the children must realize that learning also takes place out of their presence. In any team game, the world over, children organize their play in its logical fashion even if an adult is not available to guide them. First they make sure that the teams are even. They want competition. They want the game to be fair and challenging, thus forcing them to play to their full potential. Second, kids don't need referees. The

players take care of the rules themselves, modifying them according to conditions and the environment: no off-side, more players, bigger field, and so forth. Third, teams are often composed of players of different ages. The younger players learn from the older ones, who, at the same time, are challenged by the younger players. This is how good teams are built at the senior level as well.



**Need to play.** Playing games is as vital for children as sleep. Playing is necessary for the health of their bodies and minds. As children learn by playing, the central part of each training session should be the practice and understanding of simplified games. The art of coaching is to always adapt it to the children's ability and capacity level—and not vice versa. Playing games stimulates communication and decision making; playing hockey without thinking can be compared to shooting without aiming.

**Need to socialize.** Children instinctively look for communication with others. The older they are, the more they need company of a similar age. They love to be associated with a group and to identify themselves with a group or team with the aim to achieve common objectives.

**Need to move.** Nature wants her children to be active. Youngsters have no patience to wait in queues for their turn. Rules of the adult games must be modified to allow children to play the ball more often. Games with few players assure active participation.

**Need to live in the present.** Generally spoken, neither the past nor the future interests children very much. Their sense of time is completely different than that of adults. Children live intensely in the present moment without bothering about tomorrow or yesterday, which they deem to be far away.

**Need for variety.** Children crave variety, which results in less boredom and fatigue. A great variety of stimulates is fundamental to maintaining their attention level. Unless you frequently vary the method of presentation and the contents, most children's attention deviates. You should also vary the grade of intensity of the exercises and games.

**Need to be understood by adults.** Children seem to live in a different world. They have different problems, they learn differently, and they don't think as logically as adults do. Their ideas, thoughts, or reasoning often lack coherence. Their emotional constancy depends in a high degree on their speed of biological growth. In general kids don't know how to use their energy well and, therefore, tire easily. They behave exactly the way they feel. For all these reasons, adults who live and work with children should know how to stimulate and guide them in their search for personality and identity.

## ELIMINATING ANXIETY

In a study conducted by Pierce and Stratton (1981), 453 youth sport participants were asked to identify the worries that bothered them so much that they might not play in the future. Most of these children indicated that not playing well (63.3 percent) and making a mistake (62.5 percent) were the major stressors when playing sports. Related to these anxieties, 44.2 percent stated that their worries prevented them from playing their best and 23.6 percent suggested that the anxiety from being worried might prevent them from playing in the future.

We all know that one main stress factor for children in a competition is the strong desire of their parents and coaches to see them winning. Pressured by the adults, the young players perceive anxiety before, during, and even after the game, instead of competing mainly to have fun with friends.

Administrators, teachers, parents, and other adults tend to evaluate children's abilities and capacities unrealistically high, forcing them to participate in competitions in which the young players will not do well. In turn, the unrealistic expectations thus cause the youngsters to view themselves as failures, destroying their motivation and self-esteem. But **self-esteem is the life force of the personality**, and if that is suppressed or diminished, so is the person! As a result, children perceive that they will not be able to adequately respond to the performance demands of the difficult and complex competition for which they are not yet ready, one that was originally designed for adults a century ago.

Already before the game, children are aware of the difficulty of the task (pre-competition anxiety). During the game, the young players demonstrate even greater arousal levels when they experience their limitations through making more mistakes than successful moves. Even after the completion of the game, the stress level remains if the completed performance is considered inadequate.

Being more specific, the premature introduction of the 11-on-11 game for prepubescent children causes excessive stress, which then results in negative self-perception. This poor self-image severely hinders the learning process and motivation of the young players.

Young children learn most efficiently in non-stressful environments (Wilson 1984). Prepubescent children have to be exposed in each stage of evolution to a tailor-made competition that assures they perceive their own competence while playing a game.

Recognizing the deficiencies in current practices is the first step to a more effective way of coaching hockey. When children's stages of development are not considered in designing a training program, a gap forms between what the hockey program provide them and what the children need in order to learn. **It is time to challenge current coaching practices and stop subjecting children to exercises and games that are too complex to match their mental and physical development. By tailoring the game of hockey to fit the bodies and minds of young players, coaches develop successful hockey programs and happy, talented young players.**



*"You can help a player a lot by correcting him, but even more by encouraging him."*



## BILL OF RIGHTS FOR YOUNG HOCKEY PLAYERS

- 1.-The right to enjoyment both in practice and in competition, with a wide variety of activities that promote fun and easy learning.
- 2.-The right to play as a child and not be treated like an adult, either on or off the playing field.
- 3.-The right to participate in competitions with simplified rules, adapted to their level of ability and capacity in each stage of their evolution.
- 4.-The right to play in conditions of greatest possible safety.
- 5.-The right to participate in all aspects of the game.
- 6.-The right to be trained by experienced and specially prepared coaches and educators.
- 7.-The right to gain experience by resolving most of the problems that arise during the practice.
- 8.-The right to be treated with dignity by the coach, their teammates, and by their opponents.
- 9.-The right to play with children of their own age with similar chances of winning.
- 10.-The right not to become a champion.

## A successful approach to Coaching Hockey

**A**n effective approach for coaching young players has at last been developed. In this approach, called the “Hockey Development Model,” the process has been perfectly adapted to the mental and physical levels of children from different age groups. The model, which all teachers and coaches may follow, can well replace the makeshift training and competitions that have proved ineffective in the past.

The Hockey Development Model is a complete and effective training program that, since its introduction in Spanish hockey in the early 80’s, has dramatically influenced the way youngsters in more than 18 countries in Europe, Asia, and South America experience the game of hockey. The model exposes children gradually to the difficulty and complexity of the game. However, far from being a rigid model or training plan, it allows coaches to choose from a proposed menu whatever corresponds to his taste or coaching style. Instead of instructing coaches, the Hockey Development Model stimulates them, enabling them to find the best mix of activities for their particular group of players.

*“Planning the development of young players is like preparing for a journey. It’s advisable to have a map (plan or model) to avoid getting lost and wasting time and energy”.*

## THE HOCKEY DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Before applying the model to developing a plan for your young hockey players, let's outline just how the model was created and exactly what it consists of.

### Creating the Model

The Hockey Development Model takes into account everything that is known regarding a child's progressive development. It not only respects the laws of nature but also meets the expectations of the young players.

Just as children have basic needs that should be satisfied in designing a soccer program, they also have certain expectations. When children play hockey, they are primarily interested in four things: action, personal involvement in the action, close scores, and opportunities to reaffirm relationships with friends.

Because each of these factors is so important to the well being of the children, all four were clearly in mind in designing the training and competitive programs in the Hockey Development Model. Numerous changes were made to more traditional training and competitive programs in order to please the children:

- The rules of many traditional exercises or games were simplified or modified to increase activity. We know that whenever children create their own games, they devote a good deal of effort to setting up rules that foster action. Most of the activity during their games occurs around the scoring area, and scores are so frequent that everybody scores at least once.
- Many exercises and games were designed specifically to increase the personal involvement of every player, allowing them to be in the center of action frequently and therefore feel important.
- Changes in game rules and scoring methods helped keep game scores close and heightened challenges. In training, teams are often constructed or modified to keep game scores close enough to make the activity both interesting and challenging, even if outstanding players must accept handicaps.
- The organization of teams and practices was changed so that friends have opportunities to play together in a variety of ways.

Children have four phases of motor development (Gallahue 1973), and the design of the Hockey Development Model takes these into consideration. These four phases are:

1. reflex movements-from birth until about eight months,
2. rudimentary movements-from the end of the first year of life until the end of the second,
3. fundamental movements-from the second year until about the sixth, and
4. specific or sport movements-from the sixth or seventh year onward.

By the age of seven years, most children are fairly proficient (though not yet mature) in fundamental motor skills, and start to use these basic motor skills until they improve both qualitatively and quantitatively. They also learn to vary, modify, and combine them into transitional motor activities. For example, they combine running with jumping, running with kicking the ball in different ways, or running (like a sprinter or a soccer, football, or basketball player) with the ball under control.

*"All coaches have the same objective, but choose different roads"*

This last phase is precisely where the Hockey Development Model begins. This ensures that the children are therefore exposed only to the level of activity that they are ready for. Children from the specific- or sport-movements phase should be exposed to the first level of the Hockey Development Model, then follow the suggested plan step by step and in the timeline indicated.

### **The Five Levels of Progression**

The Hockey Development Model comprises five different formation levels:

Level 1: Games for basic abilities and capacities

Level 2: Games for Mini-Hockey

Level 3: Games for 6-on-6 Hockey

Level 4: Games for 8-on-8 Hockey

Level 5: Games for official 11-on-11 Hockey



These levels represent a progressive sequence of exercises and simplified games supplying the most common game situations for this age group. There may be fewer players, reduced dimensions in the playing field, fewer or less-complicated rules, and so forth. Young hockey players progress slowly from one unit or game to the next one and

are continuously confronted with slightly more complex and difficult problems. They progress to the next level only after understanding and mastering the technical and tactical requirements of the previous simplified game or competition. **Their training thus becomes a developmental process of gradually increasing demands.**

**The step-by-step approach, both for players and their coaches, is one of the keys of success in this method.** Each segment is broken down into a series of small steps, leading gradually and methodically to the final goal of each level of accomplishment or formation: being able to perform well in the respective competition of that particular age group.

At the first level, youngsters aged seven years and up encounter a games program of basic abilities and capacities. These include a great variety of multilateral games; dribbling; passing, receiving, and shooting; and tackling. They are exposed to simplified competitions (like the hockey decathlon and triathlon) and a great variety of multilateral games. Through them children have sufficient opportunities to practice and discover varied motor skills prior to and during their acquisition of hockey-specific skills. Other youngsters, who at this stage of development do not get a great variety of multilateral motor stimuli, may later encounter a proficiency barrier. Learning more complex skills may become extremely difficult for them if their fundamental skills and transitional motor activities have remained poorly developed.

In the **first level** of the Hockey Development Model, children practice fundamental skills like dribbling, passing, and shooting.

Once through the different multilateral tasks, the children progress to the **second level**. This level comprises a progressive series of simplified games for teams of two players, in which the children not only experiment with and improve in the correct use of the skills learned in Level 1, but also build up their capacities in communication and cooperation. The objective of this level is to understand and learn to successfully play the Level 2 competitive “Mini-Hockey” (first 3-on-3 without a goalkeeper, then 3-o-3 with a goalkeeper) and the “3-on-3 Triathlon.”

All proposed activities in **Level 3** (simplified games 3-on-3, simplified games for the penalty corner and the seep hit, 4-on-4 Hockey Triathlon, and the development of young goalkeepers) lead to the capacity of playing 6-on-6 Hockey across the width of the official field.

At **Level 4** the players mainly encounter a program of simplified games for teams formed by four and five players. Here they will consolidate skills, with help of the activities of the first three levels. They chiefly employ corrective exercises and develop their reading and reacting skills, which allow them to perform well in 8-on-8 Hockey between the areas of the official field.

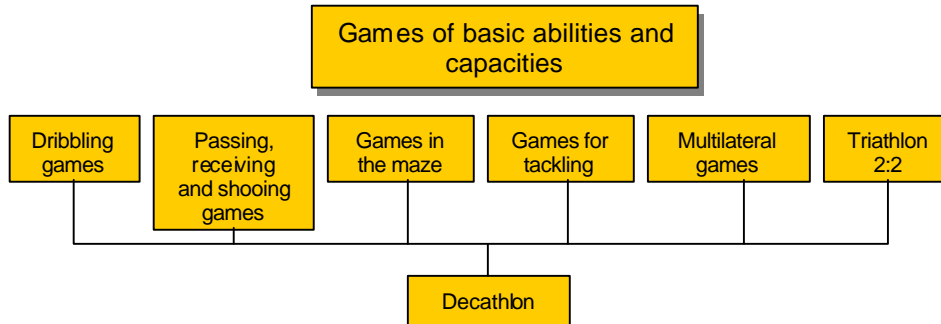
At **Level 5**, whose developmental program is presented in a second volume (available only in Spanish, published 1992 by the National Olympic Committee of Spain), the adolescents ready themselves to play the full game.

The Hockey Development Model contains individual exercises and simplified games as well as collective and complex game situations.

*“We learn best to play hockey by playing”*

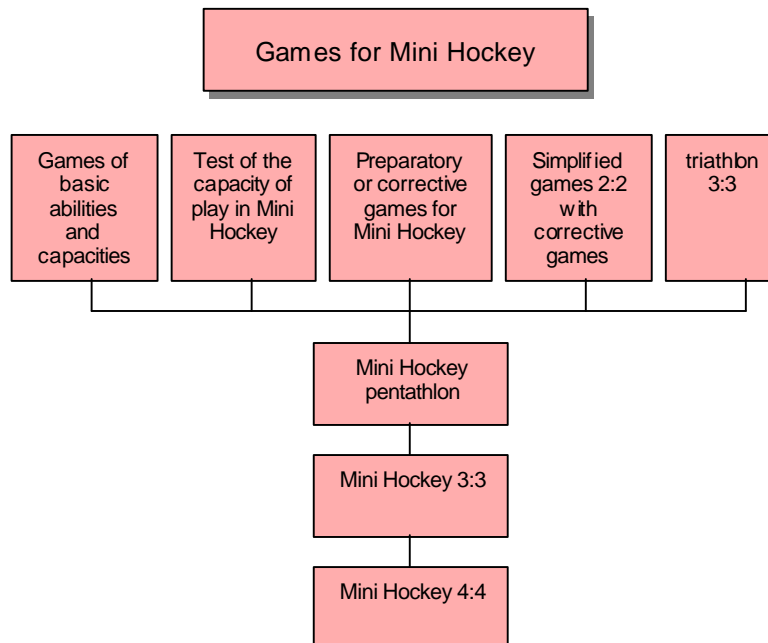
## 1st level

(generally for boys and girls from 7 years onwards)



## 2nd level

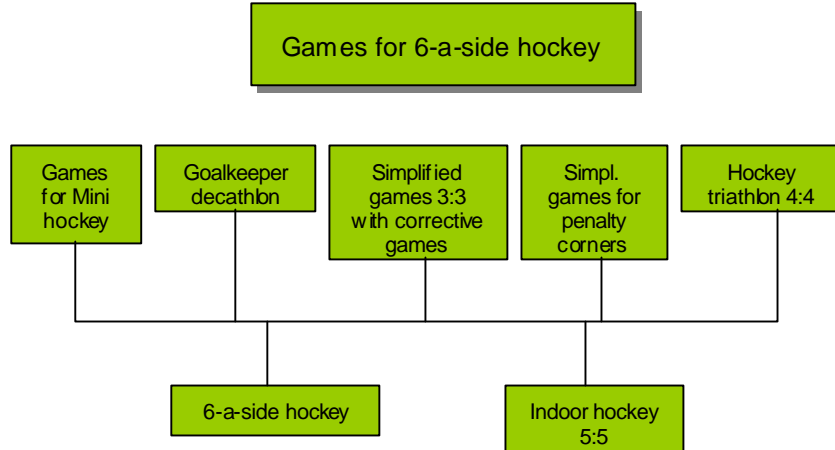
(generally for boys and girls from 8 years onwards)



*"Moving step by step, you may travel great distances."*

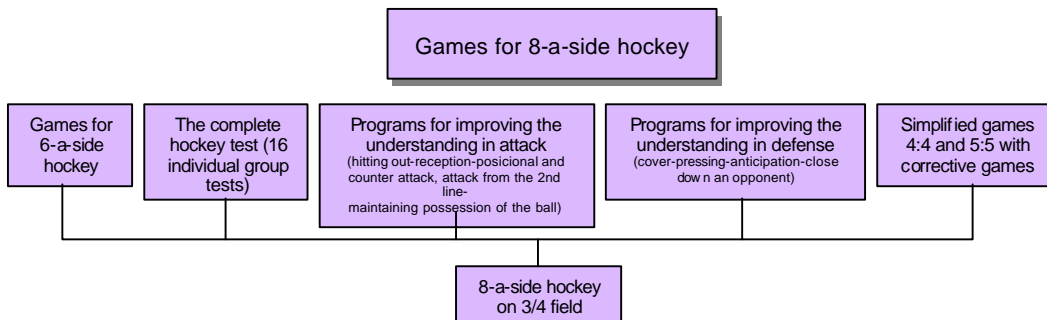
### 3rd level

(generally for boys and girls from 10 years onwards)



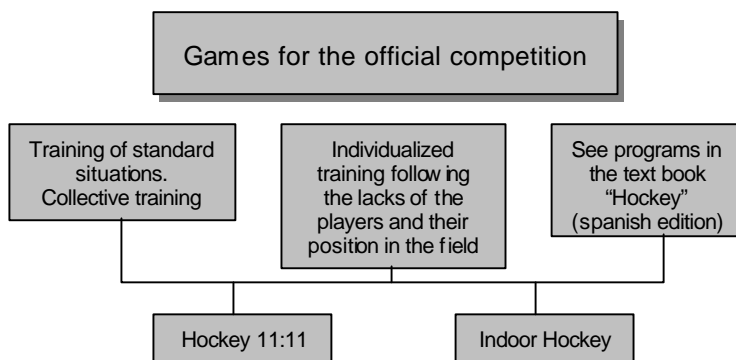
### 4th level

(generally for boys and girls from 12 years onwards)



### 5th level

(generally for boys and girls from 16 years onwards)



### Advantages of the Development Model

To further convince you that the Hockey Development Model is the most effective way to stimulate young players, the advantages of implementing this model are now outlined. It will benefit not only your hockey coaching but also, more importantly, the young players themselves.

### Link Between Training and Competition

Each level is composed of various corrective exercises and preparatory games especially designed to match the different tasks that competition demands among the players in each age group. Solid bridges are constructed between learning a subject and correctly applying it moments later in a simplified training game or the official competition. Training and competition are always seen as a unit, one being tightly linked to the other. This differs from traditional methods that often deprive children of an efficient training and learning process that fosters understanding of the game, fundamental for a good performance. Instead of focusing mainly on *how* to execute a closed skill, **the Hockey Development Model coaches children on how the skill should be best applied: when, where, and why.** This assures that the players are always highly motivated because they see the training practice always in function of the game and not isolated from the competition (as observed all too often among youth hockey players).

### Increase in Successful Actions

Players who take part in competitions specially designed for their age (Mini-Hockey 3-on-3 and 4-on-4; 6-on-6 and 8-on-8 Hockey) will have far more successful actions than in the traditional game, thereby leading to an increase in self-esteem.

The game of Mini-Hockey played with only three players per team is manageable for 8-year-old beginners and, with an additional goalkeeper, for 9-year-old ones. In the same way, the players under 12 years consider the seven-member team game as the right challenge and the under-14 players understand the game with eight players per team on  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the full field. The following table provides a brief description of this progression. Each game is explained in much more detail in following chapters.

### Enjoyment of the Game

Naturally, when players execute more successful actions, they enjoy the game more. Every two years the difficulty and complexity of the competition is increased in perfect harmony with the growing physical and intellectual capacities of the players. When young players progress with the help of the Hockey Development Model from so simple a base and in such small increments, the occurrence of significant failure is out of question. Enjoyment and confidence in their capabilities become the driving force for the players' motivation and further progress. ***The correct use of the model reinforces success, whereas the traditional way of subjecting children to the difficulty and complexity of the full game only reinforces failure.*** As success reinforces success, failure reinforces failure.

*“Planning the development of young players is like preparing for a journey. You need to have a map (plan) available to avoid getting lost and wasting time and energy”*



Unfortunately, most people still associate great performance with pain, struggle, and exhaustion. In hockey, the idea that learning can be fun is still novel. Whatever is enjoyable seems to be forbidden. Even though playing is the mode in which children discover their world, too often the moment they get on the training ground, the joy of discovery is quashed.

The following illustration represents the difference between the current way of coaching and the coaching method suggested by the Hockey Development Model. Presently, most children struggle to meet the demands of a competition geared toward adults. However, with the game tailored to a child's development and gradual progress to more complex activities, the youngsters can experience much more success and, most importantly, they enjoy the game.

**In the future, hockey competitions will hopefully be tailored to match a child's gradual physical and intellectual development.**

**AN IDEAL PROGRESSION OF COMPETITIONS**

Age in the year when season starts	Number of players on the pitch	Reserves	Duration of the competition	Rules of the competition	Measurements of the pitch	Referee Umpires	Age of referee or umpires
Beginners 8	3 Mini-Hockey (without GK)	1	3x10 min.	No hit	25x35 m. 109m <sup>2</sup> /play	1	Under 14
Beginners 9	4 Mini-Hockey (without GK)	1	3x10 min.	No hit	25x35 m. 146m <sup>2</sup> /play	1	Under 14
Under 12 (10-11)	6	2	2x25 min.	With hit With p.c.	47,5x55 m. 218m <sup>2</sup> /play	1	Under 18
Under 14 (12-13)	8	4	2x30 min.	With hit With p.c.	55x70 m. 240m <sup>2</sup> /play	2	Under 18
Under 16 (14-15)	11	5	2x35 min.	Official ones	55x95 m. 237m <sup>2</sup> /play	2	Under 20
Under 18 (16-17)	11	5	2x35 min.	Official ones	55x95 m. 237m <sup>2</sup> /play	2	Under 22

NOTE: BEGINNERS play indoor hockey with the rules of the Mini game (4 vs. 4 including goalkeeper). UNDER 12, UNDER 14, and UNDER 16 players compete in indoor hockey with only 5 players/team plus 3 substitutes and the possibility to lift the ball if it's not dangerous.

*"The success is composed by a serie of small daily victories"*

Zig Ziglar

### Ease of Application

Players aren't the only ones who reap the benefits of the Development Model. The model provides coaches with a complete and effective training plan that can easily be applied to their players. Applying the Development Model gives even the most inexperienced hockey coach the ability to gradually, yet effectively, guide young players into the full game of hockey. The result is already known after 20 years of experiments: more intelligent and complete hockey players.

To become more familiar with the Hockey Development Model, teachers can even attend a weekend-long refresher coaching course. (For more information, send an e-mail to horstwein@redestb.es.) In such a course, coaches learn the reasons behind a particular training and competition program for a particular age group and how to implement that program. Coaches not only acquire a detailed knowledge of the model's contents and what objectives to achieve with each exercise or simplified game, they also become familiar with the most effective methods and coaching style to apply.

### Fixed Goals

To make the model as useful as possible to the coach, it has been structured in a hierarchical order, both with overall objectives (for example "Games for Mini-Hockey") and specific, partial aims (for example "Dribbling Games" or "3-on-3 Triathlon") for each level. For each game or exercise, specific goals have been identified. Having the goals fixed for each category provides these benefits:

Gives coaches guidelines for structuring and developing the training and learning process and allows them, after assessing the content, to add their own training programs to those proposed in the model

- Helps link the proposed program to the fixed goals
- Adds incentives for the children, allowing them to focus their efforts on some definite objective, without having to guess why they are playing some way or what they are aiming toward
- Allows the coach to discover whether or not he is achieving the objectives and to make any necessary alterations

With the objectives clearly defined and fixed for each category of children's hockey-one of the key elements of this unique teaching and learning model-the children are not exposed to a training process in which mere improvisation and intuition on the coaches' part determine content. The development model incorporates relevant sport science and motor development research in its program. This way, countless correct habits are developed in the early years of learning, resulting in the desired improvement of performance at higher levels.

Most youth coaches teach several days a week, without knowing whether they are doing it right or not. For them, their old habits, acquired long ago, are comfortable; they're methods that they've used frequently without much thinking. When exposed to the simple and effective training programs of the Hockey Development Model, however, they might well double their effectiveness, doing a better job in less time and with half the effort.

*"When a federation doesn't support research, improvement and progress are put aside"*

## COACHING PHILOSOPHY

Without the right coaching philosophy, the Development Model will take you only so far. Coaches should always maintain a healthy, positive attitude during training and competition.

### Philosophy During Competition

These are some basic principles that all coaches should apply during competition.

- For boys and girls between 8 and 14 years old, always consider playing well as more important than winning. While learning to play, the participants must forget about the result of the game. They should be encouraged to take some risks, despite the fact that this kind of play might allow the opponents to score. Players, parents, and coaches should consider competition only as another kind of training.
- Mobilize all your efforts to reach victory, but never look to win at any price. Victory should never be considered the only important thing to achieve.
- Don't mind losing a match, because defeat is always a possibility when competing; there is no guarantee for winning. If another team beats yours, it's generally because of their better play. It should never be because your team didn't put all its efforts into the game to win it. As long as you have tried hard and played up to your capability to prevent the defeat, you never should feel like losers.
- Winning isn't as important, nor losing as bad, as most parents believe. It all depends on what a team was able to demonstrate. Players may win after having showed a poor game played in a destructive manner-and they may lose despite having played much better than the opponents and having enjoyed every minute of the game.
- Learn to play in a competition as though it is a matter of practice and train with the spirit of playing an important competition.
- Winning is only a consequence of playing well. That is why every player has only to look to give his or her very best. The result will fall like a ripe fruit falls from the tree.
- In all youth categories up to 14 years, coaching to win a match is easier than coaching to play the game well. Playing well allows you to discover new solutions to old problems, again and again. Teaching to win, on the other hand, means you limit and restrict the game mainly to those already known skills and tactical moves that are important for winning it (like long clearances, "kick and rush" philosophy, pressing defense, etc.). Yet when you compete this way, in the long run you also restrict and limit the complete formation of the young players.

*"If you want to win, you almost have to forget about winning."*

L. Moorhouse/L. Cross

## Coaching Characteristics

Certain characteristics can help a coach become well-accepted by their young players (Halliwell 1994). Here are some of those identifiable characteristics:

- Previous experience and successes as a player
- Previous experience and successes as a coach
- Pleasant appearance, in physicality as well as in dress
- Correct (healthful) lifestyle (habits)
- Correct proceedings in work: punctuality and efficiency
- Good organization of training sessions, meetings, travel
- Good communication level: knows how to explain concepts and also how to listen
- Good disposition-always has time for the players
- Ample knowledge of techniques and tactics and how to coach them
- High motivation for passing his knowledge onto the players through questioning
- Positive approach-encourages and motivates players with positive remarks, creates enthusiasm, praises frequently
- Knows to coach from the bench: readjusts his team's play through quick decision making, changes players shrewdly, has a sense of humor
- Can exercise leadership in the dressing room as well as on the ground during training and matches
- Self-control-emotionally stable, transmits calmness and serenity, especially when conflicts arise
- Desires to improve constantly-looks out for new exercises and games as well as for new coaching methods or styles, self-critical in his coaching
- Capacity to observe, analyze, and correct mistakes or wrong habits
- Honest and fair with the young players-doesn't favor any particular player, demands a lot but is fair to everybody
- Open to any suggestion-stays flexible, listens to the suggestions of his players and assistants
- Demonstrates true interest in his players (and for their problems off the playing field)
- A good coach has the ability to observe and analyze their players' movements and correct mistakes.



### Maintaining a Positive Attitude

A coach of young hockey players should conscientiously do and say things that make the young players feel

- good,
- accepted,
- important,
- happy, and
- successful.

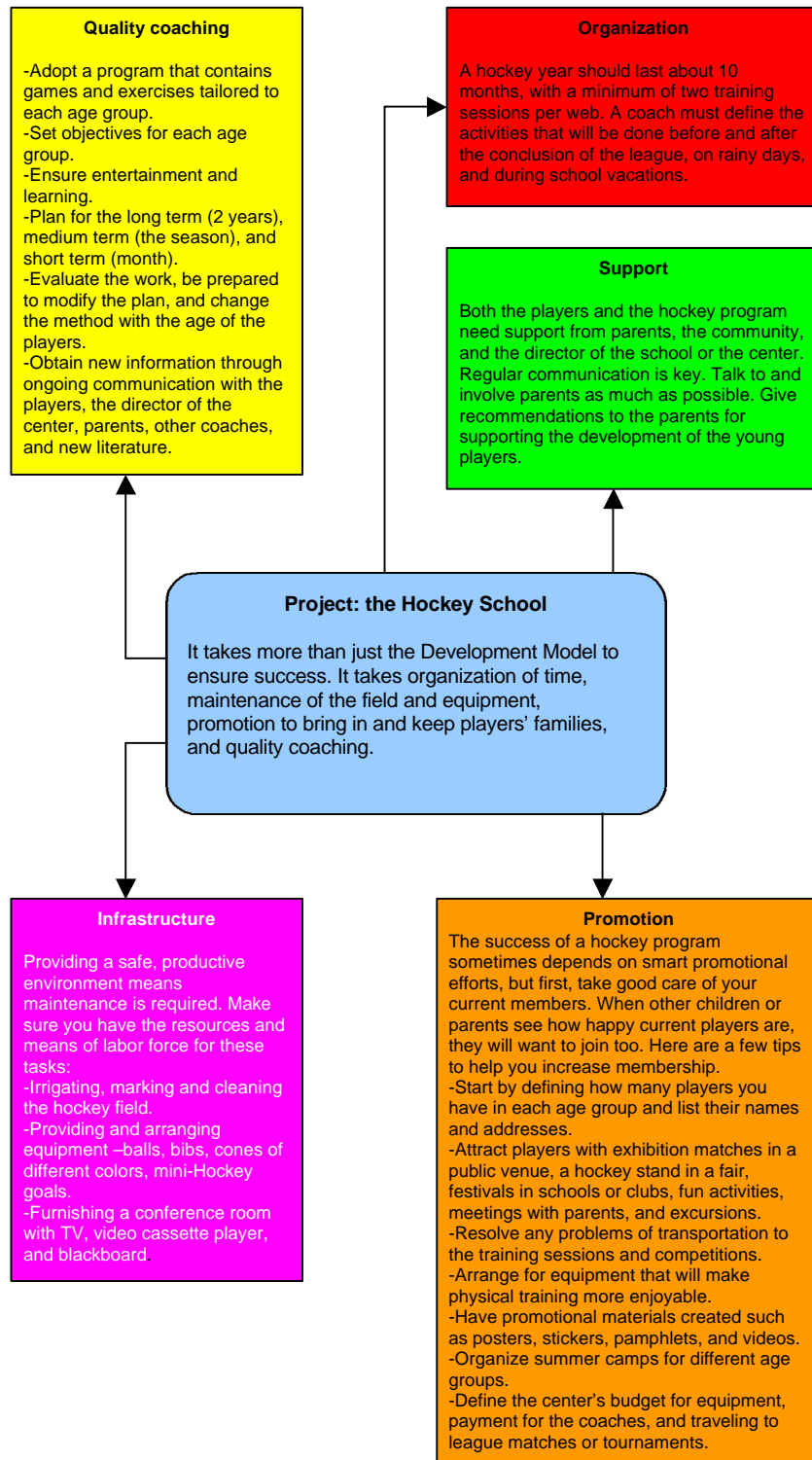
Try these simple gestures:

- A warm greeting, using the player's name
- A smile
- A thumbs-up sign
- A pat on the back
- Talking with players
- Playing some games or activities with them
- Asking their advice and listening to what they say
- Helping them learn something new or to improve something
- Helping players adjust their personal objectives
- Attending to all their questions
- Showing interest in their friends, family, and hobbies
- Providing fun and enjoyable activities
- Giving encouragement
- Praising, avoiding criticism
- Including the youngsters in the teaching process through effective questioning

In addition to the right coaching philosophy, a successful hockey program requires organization, community support, sound promotional efforts, and a safe environment.

*“The major obstacle for the progress in hockey is ‘force of habits’. Because of stubbornness many coaches continue with their old coaching patterns without questioning what they are actually teaching”*





Combining the right coaching philosophy with the step-by-step progression in the Hockey Development Model is a surefire formula for success. The experience of success in the tailor-made competitions is a great motivator for progressing even further, but so long as the federations, clubs, and schools are not aware of the necessity to introduce this logical progression of competitions, improvement will not take place. When more federations decide, at no expense, to provide for each youth category a proper annual competition, more children will have the opportunity to play well and to enjoy the game.