

# **IDAHO ICEWORLD GUIDELINE FOR PLAYING UP OR PLAYING DOWN**



## **Background**

Every year the question comes to the Hockey Coordinator if I can have my child play up. It can be easy for parents to push the envelope with their children when it comes to youth sports. They believe their child is the best of the bunch and they want him or her to be challenged against the best possible competition. For many that means playing up to the next age level.

A select group of athletes are good enough to play with older players, their talents well beyond what most of their peers possess, but for most, the impact of playing up can have a negative effect in the long run.

“Sports are about long-term development. There is no reason to rush the process,” said Ryan Hardy, the director of player personnel for USA Hockey’s National Team Development Program. “There is a lot of value in taking your time rather than rushing to play up a level.” If Hardy had his choice when it comes to young athletes, he believes the best situation for them is to stay within their age group, both for on-ice and off-the-ice purposes

## **USA Hockey Rocky Mountain Guide for playing up and Playing down**

### **Playing Up**

Hockey rules permit a player to ‘play up’, but players should not generally ‘play up’ more than one age classification. For example, an 8-year-old player may ‘play up’ one age group, so he/she could play for the “10 and under” team, if the coach and the association will allow it to occur. In some cases, based on the skill or size of a player, it may be desirable to utilize this option; in other cases, it may be best for the player to remain in the lower age group, even though the child or his/her parents want them to ‘play up.’

Nothing in USA Hockey’s rules requires an association to allow any player(s) to ‘play up.’ All such requests should be made in writing to the local association, by the parents or guardian, to help document any such requests and the parents/guardian’s desire to have it granted. The written document can become important if the player becomes injured, as a result of the ‘play up’ request. An impartial evaluation of the player’s skills {compared to others at the level requested} by a panel of neutral coaches, should be made before a decision is made on a ‘play up’ request.

### **Playing Down**

In order for a player (of any age), regardless of physical size or skill level, to ‘play down’, it must be shown by the child’s physician that it is medically necessary for the child to do so. The doctor must detail the specific medical condition that causes the child to incur this medical necessity of ‘playing down’. Players who are granted permission to ‘play down’ should be limited to participation in house leagues and are not eligible to compete on a team bound for a National Championship Tournament.

Additionally, an “Atypical Medical Condition” waiver and release form will be required to be completed and signed by the parents or guardian before any such ‘play down’ permission can be considered. Most of the atypical medical conditions which have been permitted to ‘play down’ involve mental, physical or emotional impairments that create a handicapping situation for the player to have to overcome.

Simply being “small for their age” or “not very skilled” are not considered to be adequate reasons for granting a ‘play down’ exception, since they do not rise to the level of a handicap under the definitions and current court decisions about the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

### **Idaho IceWorld Recommended Policy**

Idaho IceWorld (IIW) recognizes that its primary goal is to develop every child to his/her fullest potential. IIW will follow the guidelines set forth by USA Hockey Rocky Mountain District. It is the policy of the IIW that each registered player will play in his/her age level as set forth by USA Hockey Rules. However, individual requests to play-up may be considered by the Hockey Director, and reviewed on a case by case basis. IIW

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recognizes that in certain situations it may be appropriate and/or beneficial to a player's development to play-up to the next age level. IIW will consider and evaluate a player's development potential in his/her actual age level versus potential for success in an older age level. IIW will also consider the fine balance between the best interest of a player requesting to play-up and IIW teams and players in both their actual age level, as well as older level.

There is an increased risk of injury for participants playing outside of their actual age classification. However, USA Hockey and IIW allows the movement in certain situations if specific guidelines are followed:

A player will not be permitted to move up more than one year in age, except in very rare and specific cases. For example, a first year Squirt cannot be moved to the Pee Wee level. A second year Squirt may advance to the Pee Wee level. This will apply at Mite, Squirt, Pee Wee and Bantam levels.

Only requests submitted in writing by the participant's parents or legal guardians will be considered. This request must be submitted and received by the IIW Hockey Coordinator at least 14 days prior to the first day of Try-Outs or the Evaluation Skate.

A player requesting an opportunity to play-up must also try-out for his/her actual age level team. For example, a Mite level player who is granted a play-up request to Squirt must register and try-out for both Mite and Squirt level teams and pay the try-out registration fee for both Mite and Squirt, or they forgo the opportunity to play on the Mite team if not selected for the Squirt team. If the player is selected for the older level team, they will be credited for the younger level try-out registration fee. If the player is not selected for the older team, they will not be credited for the older level try-out registration fee.

IIW will evaluate each request. Criteria for allowing a player to play-up will be based on the evaluation of the player's skill and ability to contribute to the older team, the player's emotional and physical maturity level compared to the older team's players, physical size and number of players at each level. The play-up player must be projected to be a dominant player on the older team. A player requesting to play-up must be a better player than the top two players of the age division he/she is moving in to. If the player is not projected to be a dominant player on the older team, then it is highly questionable whether playing up is truly in the best interest of that player or the team.

Allowing players to play-up from a non-checking division to a checking division represents the greatest risk and will therefore receive additional scrutiny.

IIW Hockey Coordinator decision is final.

Once a player has participated on a team at a higher USA Hockey age level, the player is not permitted to play for a team at his actual USA Hockey age level for the remainder of the season (Play-up; Stay up Rule).

Upon request, the participant's parent(s)/guardian must sign the IIW Risk Acknowledgement and Liability Waiver, acknowledging the risks associated with playing outside of a player's actual age classification.

### **Resources**

- <http://www.usahockeymagazine.com/article/2016-08/pros-and-pitfalls-playing>
- [http://www.admkids.com/news\\_article/show/415852?referrer\\_id=940598](http://www.admkids.com/news_article/show/415852?referrer_id=940598)
- <http://www.rockymountainhockey.com/page/show/804302-playing-up-and-playing-down>