An Open Letter regarding AAU Ice Hockey

Dear parents, coaches & organizers,

I have been asked to provide some comments, information and materials, which may be useful to parents and coaches struggling with a decision on whether or not to bring their children, teams and associations into AAU Ice Hockey programs.

Why me?

After helping to create an extremely successful 3v3 Half-Ice league for Mini-Mites (6U), I was asked to serve on the ADM Committee for the Michigan district of USA Hockey. I accepted and even while being a strong proponent of Small Area Games, I was and still am a strong advocate of keeping the ADM and any similar concepts as voluntary programs. Simply put, any “one-size-fits-all” concept is NOT an appropriate course for youth hockey.

I and others on the Committee reasoned that a voluntary ADM used for education would draw on the combined talents, knowledge and experience of local coaches and their associations. Advancing the theory that we are stronger than the sum of our parts when we involve our coaches and parents into an evolutionary process of developing ice hockey methods.

Unfortunately, the Michigan USA Hockey district chose to mandate cross-ice, while turning their back to many of their members, parents and coaches. I resigned from their ADM Committee and formed a Mite (8U) league within AAU Hockey, which has since grown and spread into other states.

Some apparently feel that because of this history, I should be able to offer insight to those who are considering a similar move. Clearly, there have been challenges along this path of creating new ice hockey programs that is outside of the monopoly-control of USA Hockey and its affiliates. I’m certain that similar challenges remain ahead. However, if asked whether I would take this path again then I would respond, YES! Any regrets? We should have come to AAU long ago!

For those outside of the state of Michigan, the questions and answers that follow are written from the perspective of our Michigan operations. Therefore, some issues may be more of a local concern, such as questions about a local AAU league. Your league(s) may operate differently and/or have its own rules.

I hope that many of you will joins us at AAU Hockey, in helping to create a program that your children, families and teams will truly enjoy.

Keith Kloock
Best regards,
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Q&A regarding Participation within AAU Hockey

The dramatic expansion of AAU ice hockey continues to present a great many questions from coaches, managers and parents who are interested learning about AAU Hockey programs and opportunities. After all, USA Hockey and its affiliates have enjoyed a virtual monopoly for decades and until recently many weren’t even aware that AAU sanctioned ice hockey. Around the US, rumors cause ice hockey participants to mistakenly believe that USA Hockey has some sort of an exclusive right to administer all youth ice hockey. While in fact, this has simply never been the true.

In order to clarify some of these mistaken beliefs and rumors, please consider the following Q&A.

1. **May a PLAYER who participates within AAU Hockey programs, later participate within USA Hockey?**
   
   YES. It would be a violation of both United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and even USA Hockey policies for any directors, officers or employees of USA Hockey or its affiliates to penalize anyone for their participation within AAU Hockey. To help clarify this point, please consider that the USA Hockey legal counsel has issued the USA Hockey Guidelines Regarding Non-Sanctioned Play. It is important to publicize this policy, which states in part that:
   
   “Any Individual Participant may become a member of USA Hockey. Membership in or registration with another sanctioning body may not be used as a basis to deny membership in USA Hockey, its Affiliates or local programs. Correspondingly, no Individual Participant may be penalized for participating in a program that is not sanctioned by USA Hockey. …”

2. **May a COACH who participates within AAU Hockey programs, later participate within USA Hockey?**
   
   YES. Essentially for the same reasons as stated above. The Ted Stevens Olympic and Amateur Sports Act [Title 36 USC 220522(a)7] doesn’t merely protect the membership rights of youth players. The Act protects all Individual Participants and requires that a amateur sport organization is eligible to continue to be recognized as a national governing body only if it:
   
   “… demonstrates that its membership is open to any individual who is an amateur athlete, coach, trainer, manager, administrator, or official active in the sport for which recognition is sought, or any amateur sports organization that conducts programs in the sport for which recognition is sought, or both; …”

3. **May an INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANT (such as a player or coach) participate within both AAU Hockey programs and USA Hockey programs at the same time?**
YES. At times this can be somewhat confusing. However, the easiest way to explain this is to simply note that the AAU and USA Hockey are separate organizations. AAU can not control what its members do within outside organizations (such as while participating within USA Hockey) and similarly USA Hockey can not control what its members do outside of USA Hockey. For obvious examples, USA Hockey members may chose to participate within other organizations such as the Boy Scouts, YMCA and even within other sports organizations such as: AAU Inline Hockey, Little League Baseball, or with school Football and/or Soccer programs. AAU Hockey is no different.

4. May an entire TEAM participate within AAU Hockey programs and USA Hockey programs at the same time?

YES and NO. Obviously, this answer needs some further explanation. It is important to note that from an AAU Hockey perspective this is fine.

However, USA Hockey and/or its District affiliates currently prohibit a TEAM rostered within their organization from participating within programs that are not sanctioned by USA Hockey (at least as that same TEAM). Yet as previously addressed, INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS may compete within both organizations, ever during the same season. The distinction apparently being that INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS have individual rights, yet a TEAM rostered within USA Hockey is an affiliate.

Of course, despite the distinction mentioned above, nothing prohibits a group of INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS from banding together to also form as a group outside of USA Hockey. So clearly a group of PLAYERS and COACHES may become USA Hockey members and participate on their USA Hockey rostered team, in accordance with USAH procedures and rules. Likewise, the entire group of INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS (or a portion of them) may also become members of the AAU, form their own CLUB (team) and then participate on their AAU rostered CLUB (team), in accordance with AAU Hockey procedures and rules.

When such a group of INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS competes within a USA Hockey sanctioned practice, game, league or tournament then they are doing so as a USA Hockey rostered team and should comply with the rules and regulations of that organization.

When such a group of INDIVIDUAL PARTICIPANTS competes within a AAU Hockey sanctioned practice, game, league or tournament then they are doing so as a AAU Hockey rostered CLUB and should comply with the rules and regulations of that organization.

5. May an AAU CLUB (team) compete against a USA Hockey rostered TEAM?

YES and NO. Obviously, another explanation is needed. From the perspective of an AAU team, YES (provided that the AAU players and coaches have elected the extended benefits "AB" membership option). There is no rule within AAU prohibiting an AAU
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Hockey team from competing against a USA Hockey rostered team. In addition, the AAU extended benefits (AB) membership option provides insurance benefits to an AAU CLUB (team) and its properly registered AAU members during competitions, including non-sanctioned events. Such as while playing against a USA Hockey rostered team or against Canadian teams, tournaments, etc.

However, USA Hockey and/or its District affiliates currently prohibit a USA Hockey rostered team from competing within a non-sanctioned event. Therefore, it is important to be aware that USA Hockey may not insure a team rostered within their organization while playing against an AAU CLUB.

6. **May an AAU CLUB (team) compete against a Canadian team and/or on Canadian soil (ice)?**

YES (provided that the AAU players and coaches have elected the extended benefits "AB" membership option). Any Canadian team, league or tournament willing to compete with an AAU CLUB may do so. Some rostered and/or sanctioned through Hockey Canada may refuse to play against AAU teams. However, some will and there are other governing bodies operating within Canada.

FYI, it is important to note that Canadians may join AAU and there are already Canadians members participating within AAU Hockey. The Canadian Independent Hockey Federation (CIHF) is now operating within the AAU. Clearly, CIHF teams may now compete within AAU tournaments and/or scrimmages here in the US and our US-based teams may compete within CIHF tournaments and scrimmages. For more information about the CIHF please see: [www.cihfhockey.com](http://www.cihfhockey.com)

7. **How do I open a bank account for our team?**

In order for a Club (Team) to conduct banking within the team name there are 2 main concerns. These are (a) being entitled to use the name, and (b) having and EIN issued from the IRS. Here in Michigan there are two primary methods for entitlement to a Club (Team) name.

One method is to file for an Assumed Name with your County. This allows you to ‘Do Business As’ (DBA). Within some counties this can be very easy (others may drive you nuts). There are advantages and disadvantages to this method. Advantage, it’s easy and cheap. Disadvantage, you are personally liable for the activities of this team.

The second method is to create a Limited Liability Corporation. Advantage, the limited liability nature of a corporation. Disadvantage, most will need a lawyer, it costs more and there is more paperwork.

Obtaining the EIN is extremely easy and can be done online in only a few minutes. Most teams may simply go to [https://sa2.www4.irs.gov/modiein/individual/index.jsp](https://sa2.www4.irs.gov/modiein/individual/index.jsp) and select Begin Application, then at the bottom of the page select View Additional.
8. **Is there a league available and are we required to join.**

Within Michigan there is currently a league called the Michigan Amateur Youth Hockey League (MAYHL). They offer 6U through 18U at the B through AA competition levels. Their website is at: [www.mayhl.com](http://www.mayhl.com)

AAU teams are not required to join this or any other league. AAU Members and/or Clubs may (a) participate within MAYHL, (b) form their own league, or participate as an independent team.

However, please be aware that Michigan AAU teams are required to participate within an AAU sanctioned league in order to be eligible to compete within State Championships.

9. **I was wondering what are the rules going to be for try-outs for the fall season of AAU.**

Teams may conduct try-outs at any time. Amazingly, some tryouts were already completed in May. In ancient times (15-20 years ago) A and AA coached used to schedule tryouts for after Aug 17th, because that's when the AAA teams finished their tryouts. AAA teams generally held their tryouts during the first 2 week of August. Obviously, things have changed.

In Michigan, many teams post their tryouts on Mlive. I will also post tryouts and/or team contact information on the Teams page of the state website at: [www.hockey-michigan.org](http://www.hockey-michigan.org) for those who ask.

10. **Right now we are leaning towards Mite house (B), but depending how the league shapes up I just don't know. Can we conduct try-outs sometime in August and decide if we go house or AA?**

Yes. Currently, we haven't developed any House draft rules at the State or National level. Therefore, a House team is still simply picked by the coach, just like a travel team. Except that our Michigan Travel teams operate as Major (AA) or Minor (A), while our House teams are 2-year class and prefers to remain local.

It all comes down to playing at the most appropriate competition level. Hopefully where players are challenged but no overwhelmed.

The MAYHL intends to have approximately multiple levels of Travel, similar to what is customary within the greater Detroit area. For example, Mite Minor (A) may have Elite, Middle and Lower competition levels. Same for Mite Major (AA). With House being something just below. Teams will likely self evaluate and sign-up where they think they
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should be. Then depending partly on how coaches want their league to be run, they will hold a kind of tournament and/or pre-season to help seed teams into where they belong. Either where they signed up or if they should move up or down. Obviously, at the House (or B) level, a primary concern is to remain local in order to cut travel and also trying to keep stacked teams out. Major and Minor should strike a balance between Parity and Location. Any Elite teams will probably involve the entire greater Detroit area, although keep in mind that we now have Windsor are teams interested in AAU.

11. Please let us know when and where a meeting will be scheduled (from a team in the east-side suburbs).

We’ve already held 3 meetings Downriver with coaches and league officials, 1 meeting in the western suburbs with coaches and another in the northern suburbs (with several elite level coaches).

After this question was answered a fifth such meeting with coaches from the east-side and Macomb Country area was held on June 27th 2013. On July 17th our first meeting was held for parents. Others will occur throughout the summer.

The AAU Hockey – Michigan Annual meeting is scheduled for 12:30pm on August 11th at the Copland Center located at 2306 4th Street in Wyandotte, Michigan.

In addition, please be aware that the Michigan director is willing to travel to meet with other groups interested in AAU. However, I'd prefer to meet with mostly coaches & managers from the entire area. This allows open discussions to get a feel for how team want thing to operate. After all, we are a grass-roots-based organization and the league(s) and state organization must service the needs of our members.

12. When does AAU Hockey registration begin?

AAU normal online registration opens August 15th and those memberships extend from Sept 1, 2013 through Aug 31, 2014.

However, AAU has created an early registration process for Ice Hockey, which runs form August 1st through August 14th. During this additional two week period, AAU ice hockey Clubs (Teams) may call the national membership department directly at: (407) 934-7200 and ask for Jackie Markham. For additional information: membership@aausports.org

This early registration process will provide AAU membership benefits "such as insurance coverage" to Players and Coaches during this traditional tryout, practice and games throughout the month of August.

On August 15th and thereafter, all registrations must be processed online in the standard AAU manner.

Please be aware that no Club (Team) may conduct on-ice practices prior to the receipt of
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the form and payment by the national AAU membership office. Or, in the case of Clubs (Teams) who wait for August 15th and register online, until their registrations are processed.

13. When does the AAU Hockey season start?
As stated above, AAU memberships extend from Aug 1, 2013 through Aug 31, 2014. The MAYHL (current league) will announce when they will begin their regular season games. However, I would guess on or about Oct 1st.

14. Is there an official date when games begin?
Again, Aug. 1, 2013. However, the Team, Coaches and Players must be AAU members before playing a game.

15. What forms does everyone need to fill out?
Simply register your Club, Coaches and Players and then print the Club list when everyone is a member. Please print and carry your Club list and Birth Certificates with the team for any AAU game, scrimmage, tournament, practice or event.

Optional: Teams may ask for a formal roster, an XLS is available that can be filled in by teams and submitted to me, which I then verify for proper current memberships and return a signed copy to the team usually within a day. These are handy for tournaments. In addition, your league may make a rule requiring these rosters.

Optional: Consent to Treat and other optional form are available for download on the www.hockey-michigan.org website. Please do not turn them in. These are only for your team, if you choose to use them.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: There is a new law here in Michigan concerning CONCUSSIONS within youth sports. Among other things this law requires that (1) coaches undergo a specific online training session about concussions, (2) parents be given certain informational documents about concussions, (3) youth sports organizations maintain receipts from parents certifying that they have received such materials, and (4) participants supply a medical clearance to return following any concussion-like injury. The AAU State Hockey Director is currently compiling a package including all of the required documents and developing a procedure for compliance.

16. Who signs and what are the steps required for an official roster?
As addressed above, a Team List is adequate for play (although your league or tournament may require a more formal roster), if a formal roster is desired then currently I sign the roster as the State Director.
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17. We understand there is an issue with the refs. Is someone working on solving these issues? What ref's are we going to be able to use? Last year we used the Metro Detroit Ref's.

There should be no issue concerning Referees. If any Referee or Referee Scheduler has any concerns about officiating during AAU games then please direct them to www.hockey-michigan.org and ask them to contact the state director Keith Kloock. Any AAU teams having difficulty finding Referees should also contact Keith.

There were threats against some and rumors during the 2011-2012 season. However, USA Hockey stepped in and clarified that it would be a violation of USAH policy for anyone to threaten or penalize any Referee for officiating during AAU games. Referees merely need to become AAU members for insurance purposes.

Please be aware that no individual referee is required to officiate during AAU games, just as they are not required to official at USAH and/or MAHA games. Referees are independent contractors and as such they are free to contract with any and all organizations such as: NHL, College, MHSAA, Juniors, USAH-MAHA and AAU Hockey.

However, any attempts to coerce referees to avoid officiating during AAU games or to threaten penalties for doing so would be a violation of USA Hockey policies as well as unlawful. I ask that any such allegation and/or evidence concerning threats or coercion be reported to AAU Hockey, the Michigan Attorney General and/or the United States Federal Trade Commission (FTC) antitrust division.

18. Tournaments? Your newsletter mentioned a Thanksgiving and Christmas tournament. However, online there is a Motown Showdown in November in Detroit and an AAU Midwest Regional is listed for January. Is there a difference between these tournaments?

There will be far more tournaments. The Michigan Thanksgiving and Christmas tournaments mentioned in the Newsletter are being planned by the league (MAYHL). However, there are other non-league tournaments already being announced and there will certainly be more.

The Motown Showcase will be run by the state director (me) because it leads to potential entrance into the National Tournament. I'm also responsible for hosting the State Championships in February. Motown Showcase champions are not required to attend Nationals. However, if they pass on that opportunity then the berth to Nationals will pass to the Runner-Up team.

I've been helping multiple groups and organization to set up their AAU clubs, in order to host AAU tournaments. Any Level 2 or 3 Club may apply for an AAU tournament sanction. Any Team or organization wishing to host an AAU sanctioned tournament must become a Level 2 or Level 3 Club and apply for a sanction. This is a fairly simple online process. However, I will assist those interested.
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Several organizations already have tournaments planned within the greater Detroit area. One organization already has 7 AAU tournaments scheduled (1 per month) from September through March. There will be plenty more, here in the Detroit area, in Ohio, Illinois and around the US and Canada.

I will only list tournaments on the Hockey Michigan website when a tournament asks me to. Same with Team contact and/or Tryout information. The August 1st edition of the AAU Hockey Newsletter is intended to list as many tournament and leagues as is possible. Eventually the national AAU Hockey website will list all sanctioned events (leagues and tournaments) as well.

19. Timing and length of the Playoffs?

The league (MAYHL) and/or leagues will announce their playoffs. Our State Championships are being planned for President's Day weekend in February. It is my understanding that the MAYHL will question coaches about their Playoff style and timing.

20. Length of games?

There is no Michigan State or National rule limiting game lengths for scrimmages, leagues or tournaments. The Motown Showcase and likely the Michigan State Championships will be 12X12X12 periods. National Championships games will be 15X15X15. The MAYHL and/or other AAU leagues are free to create their own requirements. However, historically Mites within Michigan have played 10, 11 or 12 minute periods and occasionally 13.

21. Will their be a Website for all teams to update their scores and games?

The MAYHL already has their website running. No games are scheduled yet and therefore there are no schedules or results. However, theirs is a typical Pointstreak website used by many leagues and it will feature standing, schedules, game results. They also have an agreement with Pointstreak to offer website access to any teams wishing to host their own websites (I don't know the cost).
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USA Hockey Policy: Retaliation & Threats Regarding Non-USAH Programs

Since AAU Hockey began, there have been rumors and some reports of pressure and threats of retaliation against those participating within AAU Hockey by officials of USA Hockey and its affiliates.

However, USA Hockey may not permit anyone under their control (including their District and/or Local Affiliates, Leagues or Associations) to punish, threaten, blackball or to otherwise make ineligible for USA Hockey participation or benefits any Players, Coaches and/or Referees based upon their participation within another entity, such as the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU).

To clarify this point, the USA Hockey legal counsel has issued the USA Hockey Guidelines Regarding Non-Sanctioned Play. It is important to publicize this policy, which states in part that:

“All Individual Participant may become a member of USA Hockey. Membership in or registration with another sanctioning body may not be used as a basis to deny membership in USA Hockey, its Affiliates or local programs. Correspondingly, no Individual Participant may be penalized for participating in a program that is not sanctioned by USA Hockey.”

These same Guidelines go into great detail explaining that referees are also protected from retaliation and/or reprisals. Referees are not USAH referees or AAU referees, they are simply referees. USA Hockey considers referees to be independent contractors. Referees can and do work across programs without fear of reprisal. Actually they always have, working Pro, Semi-Pro, NCAA, High School and USAH games, as well as AAU games.

Reporting Violations of these Guidelines or denial of the opportunity to compete

All amateur hockey participants within the US (regardless of whether they are USA Hockey or AAU members) have the right to address such complaints to USA Hockey. In fact, the USA Hockey legal counsel has asked to be informed about violations of the policies above. The USA Hockey legal counsel is: Casey Jorgensen cjorgensen@usahockey.org (719) 538-1143

AAU Hockey members and/or those being pressured to avoid AAU Hockey should also report such violations to AAU Hockey national chairperson Keith Noll at: (715) 231-4000

You may also contact the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) Athlete Ombudsman for assistance and/or guidance in pursuing complaints. The USOC Athlete Ombudsman website can be found at: www.athleteombudsman.org or contact

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