



## **HOCKEY MANITOBA – TIMBITS UNDER-7 (U7) PROGRAM**

### **MHA RESOURCE GUIDE: Optimal Organization for U7 Programs**

It is an exciting time for players of all ages to participate in the greatest game in the world! For all players aged 6 and under, the following document will highlight important information regarding the Timbits Under-7 Program, including the organization and coordination of the Program. Examples of program outlines, resources to run effective programs, examples of ice station breakdowns and helpful online links to drills and skill manuals will be included.

As of the 2015-16 season, Hockey Manitoba adopted a new cross-ice structure for the Initiation category (now Timbits Under-7) which has been implemented for the benefit of all young players, and will be delivered by all Minor Hockey Associations (MHAs) in Manitoba. The Under-7 (U7) structure was developed using a combination of Hockey Canada U7 guidelines and Long-Term Player Development principles designed to reflect Hockey Manitoba's player-first approach to development.

#### **Philosophy and Objectives**

1. Create a safe and fun environment for players to experience the sport
2. Heavily incorporate physical literacy, fair play, cooperation and **FUN** into the sport
3. Teach basic hockey skills so players can build confidence on and off the ice, while enjoying and staying in the sport

The levels of enjoyment and development progression achieved by the players measure the success of a U7 Program. To optimize these goals, it is necessary to have a dedicated team of adults and mentors who will play a large role as effective leaders, organizers, and teachers.

Player environment must be:

- Fun
- Enjoyable
- Safe
- Challenging
- Motivating
- Meaningful
- Interactive

#### **What the Timbits Under-7 Program is:**

Timbits U7 is the next step to enjoying sports for life!

The Timbits Under-7 Program falls under the FUNdamentals stage of the Hockey Canada Long-Term Player Development Model. Timbits U7 makes the first strides in the game a safe and positive experience, introducing first-timers to basic skills. Kids become members of a team, develop self-confidence and experience personal achievement, all through fun and fair play.

The Timbits U7 Program is designed for players five and six years old, but is suitable for any entry-level hockey player, ensuring they will have fun, learn skills and develop confidence. The purpose of the program is to focus on developing and mastering physical literacy while teaching the basics of skating, skills, and teamwork. The program will provide young hockey players with the opportunity to develop their skills in a positive, fun environment led by qualified mentors and coaches. The program will consist of structured drills that will introduce basic hockey skills while progressively working towards more advanced skills – all within a cross-ice format. The skills learned from these drills will then be implemented into game like scenarios where the players will have the opportunity to play in a semi-competitive environment ensuring that we allow time for kids to “just play”.

#### Cross-Ice Format:

The U7 Program uses a cross-ice layout for all practices and game situations. The cross-ice layout consists of dividing the ice surface into one-third lateral sections for games and drill stations instead of using the entire ice surface or half ice. The rationale behind this method is simple but powerful; alike other sports, long-term hockey development research has shown that reducing the size of the playing surface offers more opportunity for skill development and greater participation from all players.

Cross-ice ice delivery is required throughout the entire U7 season in Manitoba and is strongly recommended as a phase within the early portion of the U9 hockey season. For children in the U7 program, the cross-ice format is the most realistic simulation of the game, and thus highlights its importance as we put our players in the best opportunity to reach their potential while having fun.

#### **Cross-ice format means more ...**

- Puck touches
- Passing attempts
- Passing receivals
- Shot attempts
- Puck battles
- Changes of direction – lateral movements

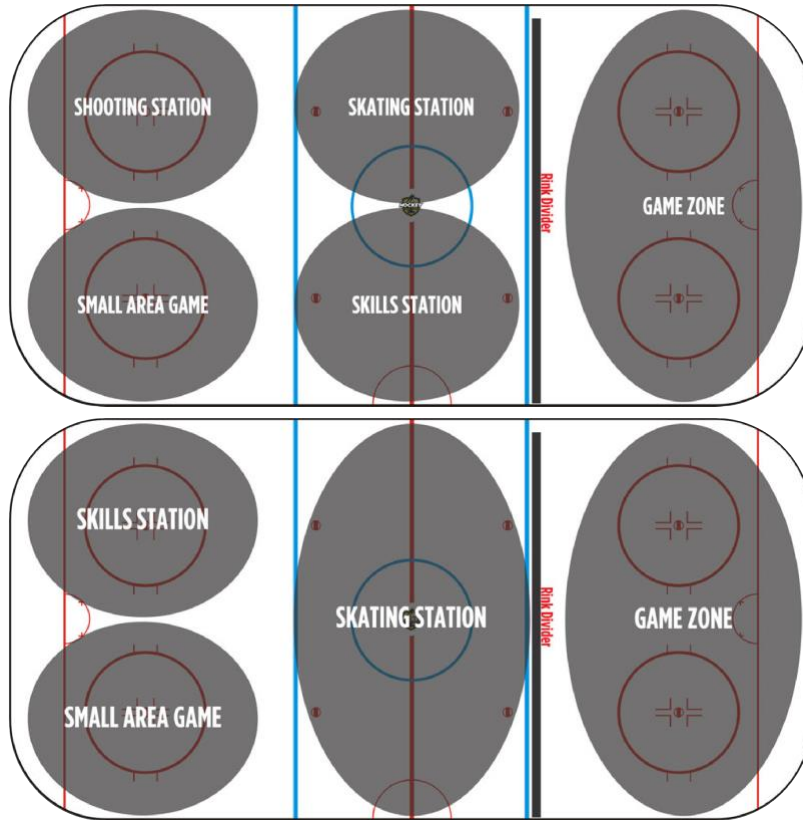
*And creates a better foundation for advanced skills, such as:*

- Well-rounded, overall skating ability
- Significant for transition skating skills
- Decisions and playmaking – critical thinking
- Quicker reactions within high pace
- Finding open spaces - anticipation
- Reading pressure and defenders
- Offensive and defensive body positioning

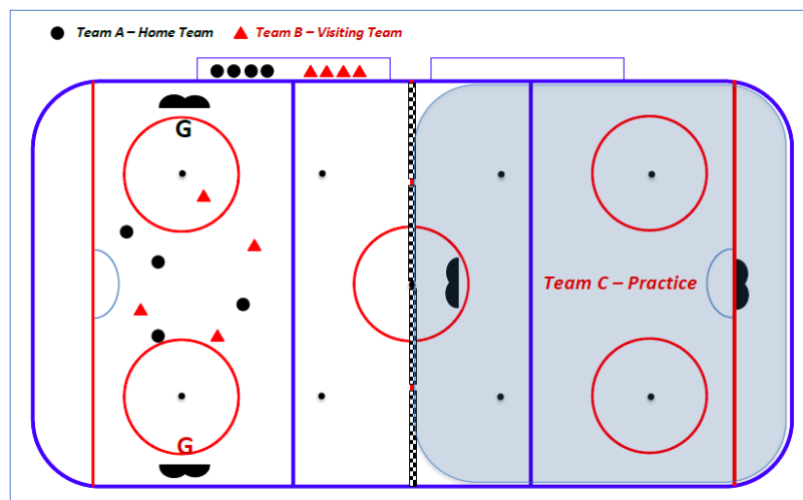
Cross-Ice Layout:

Based on common and recommended numbers of player participation each ice session here are several examples of organizing your cross-ice layout.

General sessions / practices:



If you are a small association that will only have 1 team or 15-20 players, the layout does not change, just that less ice is generally used during the session:



QUICK TIP: in a small association you can book both U7 and U9 programs together to maximize ice usage and share practice ice costs.

When creating cross-ice zones, placing dividers just inside the blue lines are good visual guides to making 3 cross sections with similar dimension sizes. These sizes will slightly vary by facility.

Whether your home rink is standard NHL size 85'x200' or a smaller old-style size surface 70'x175', creating cross-ice zones remains the same in simply making 3 similar sized zones. Smaller old-style surfaces continue to enhance all the benefits promoted for cross-ice player development.

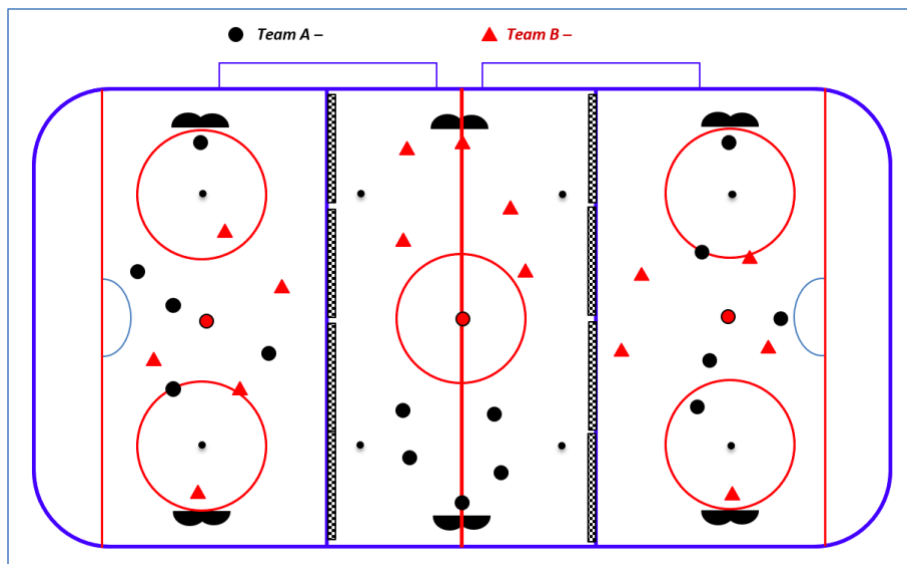
Rink dividers are a major asset for Timbits U7 Program delivery but if your facility or association does not own dividers the lines can be patrolled by coaches or another safe homemade divider.

### **Games/Tournament Layouts:**

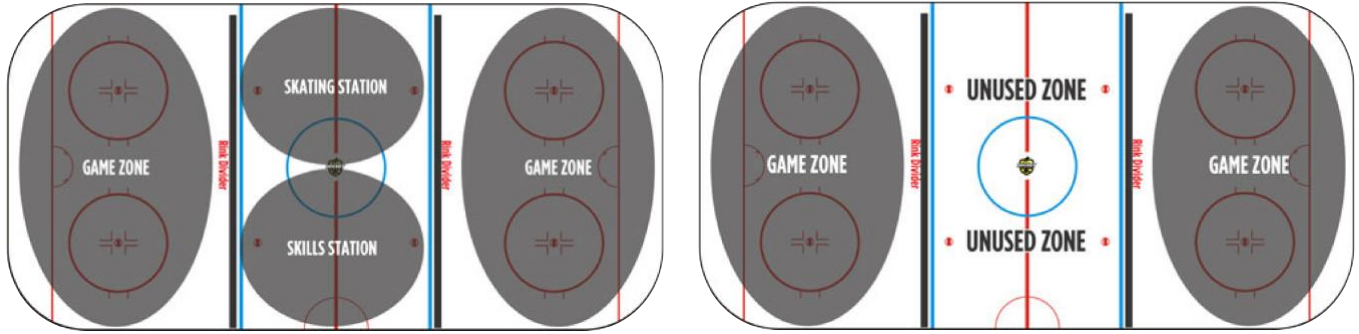
Ideally 3 teams should be booked each game session, allowing for each team to split into 3 sub-groups "A" "B" "C". Each game zone will have 3 sub-groups, a 2-minute shift rotation, and have 2 sub-groups play at once allowing the 3rd sub-group a break by simply sitting on the dividers (no benches necessary). Having 3 sub-groups allows for optimal parity amongst young players.

Common overall team size will allow for approximately 3-5 players per sub-group, and head coaches should simply discuss and divide their teams into the same or similar amount for each sub-group "A" "B" "C". Depending on team numbers, not all game zones will have the same competition format such as 5-on-5, 4-on-4, 3-on-3. It is also fine to let game zones run at 5-on-4 or 4-on-3. We do not want players sitting out any longer than their standard break in the 2-minute shift rotation. \*No goalies.

Associations and coaches can plan to have a skills zone during game sessions to continue to enhance development. In the event there are only enough players for two game zones, then ice remains as cross-ice and is **not** divided into half-ice.



Team split into 3 sub-groups / three games



### Seasonal Structure:

Each association has differing amounts of total players registered each season, however there are key structures and objectives that remain the same regardless if an association is large or small. No matter what size of the association, the priority volunteers and coaches should be optimal player development and enjoyment. The Timbits U7 seasonal structure can take on many forms. There is flexibility in the recommended timeframes local hockey associations can use to build their seasonal plan. If the season starts in October or even as late as November, the local hockey association should still follow the guidelines of a balanced season approach. Some dates and timeframes are guidelines, while others are fixed. The number of games and practices are also recommendations by on Hockey Canada using the Long-Term Player Development Model.

### THE IDEAL SEASON

Young players have an opportunity to continue their development while having a positive and fun hockey experience. The ideal season does not conflict with the start of the school year, provides a fair evaluation/selection process and is structured to maximize development opportunities. Here are some key points of the Timbits U7 Program Structure:

1. **Preparation/Evaluation Phase** (UP TO 12 WEEKS – COMBINED WITH DEVELOPMENT PHASE)
2. **Development Phase** (UP TO 12 WEEKS – COMBINED WITH PREPARATION/EVALUATION PHASE)
3. **Regular Season Phase** (UP TO 14 WEEKS)
4. **Game Play Phase** (UP TO 4 WEEKS)

For more information on what these phases entail, please visit this link: <https://cdn.hockeycanada.ca/hockey-canada/Hockey-Programs/Coaching/u7-program/downloads/2020/timbits-u7-player-pathway-e.pdf>

## **U7 Program Resources**

The use of equipment such as rink dividers and mini-nets are a great way to enhance your U7 Program. The rink dividers are a great tool to use for organization and identifying stations for drills and small area games. Mini-nets are easily maneuverable compared to regular sized nets, giving you the ability to layout your practice any way you want.

Contact Hockey Manitoba for information on different equipment you can access specifically for the Timbits U7 Program.

## **Hockey is FUN!**

Traditional routines of organizing and delivering hockey often lead to a system that significantly lacks inspiration and creativity. Having players truly fall in love with our game early on as young children is not all about the on-ice delivery. There many little details that associations and teams can coordinate throughout a season to foster more inspiration, motivation, and ultimately more enjoyment for young children.

An emphasis on physical literacy must be included not only on the ice but can often be easily incorporated off the ice with some fun activities. In doing we provide a great method for athlete development while associating more fun with our game and the association.

## **Ideas to consider:**

### Logos & Branding

- Create a hockey identity for your association for entry-level players, make it special, unique, and age-appropriate. Keep your main association name/logo incorporated but appeal to the 5-6-year-old. Fun cartoon, mascot-based logos mixed with your primary association logo will inspire!
  - Special jerseys for entry-level players with a special kid's logo will help provide a strong connection and retention for young kids. Another affordable option is to include t-shirts or another apparel item within seasonal fees to promote your association

### Fun Gatherings

- Kick-off each season with a casual community gathering for your association players such as a fun outdoor BBQ theme, and include fun activities such as inflatable bouncers, face-painting, mascots, relay races, mini sport challenges, music, and more!
  - This is a great method to attract a community sponsor into your season but more so the opportunity to directly have the MHA host a fun activity and introduce themselves to their members for the upcoming season.

### Team "Draft" Party

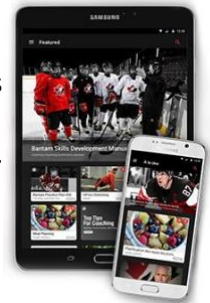
- Prior to the first ice session, rather than just providing an email to your group of players, host a fun gathering with a “draft” theme where your players are called up in a casual ceremony to receive their jersey.
  - Schedule such an event directly into your program schedule and ensure it is booked prior to registration. Perhaps one week before actual ice time begins, this can be held at the same time frame your ice time would normally run. Affordable options to budget into the event can be pancake breakfasts, hot dogs, and some ball hockey and fun dryland games as a team/group. This is a great mixer not only for kids but as well for coaches and parents.

Budgets always need to be considered but there are always many fun and creative ways to significantly enhance entry-level hockey programming that does not break the budget of an association or parent/guardian. As long as there is a willingness to enhance the season for young kids, then creativity and passion will flow in organizing such initiatives!

### **Helpful Links:**

#### **Hockey Canada Network App:**

This resource has everything you need to know about hockey development from U7 to U18! Every skills manual is on this mobile app as well as access to all of Hockey Canada’s drills and videos to help you plan your practices – free to download, purchase full app for only \$23 through a special Hockey Manitoba offer code (contact office for more info). Only available through the app.



[www.hockeymanitoba.ca/coaches/hockey-canada-network-app](http://www.hockeymanitoba.ca/coaches/hockey-canada-network-app)

#### **Hockey Canada Drill Hub:**

Here you can find age and skill specific drills and can plan your practices. This is a great online resource providing you with constantly updated content. This resource is free, mobile- responsive and available on desktop computers.

[www.hockeycanada.ca/drillhub](http://www.hockeycanada.ca/drillhub)

#### **Timbits Under-7 (U7) Program:**

<http://www.hockeymanitoba.ca/players/timbits-under7-program/>