8U Coach Playbook

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Welcome

Welcome to the Carolina Junior Hurricanes 8U Program.

Thank you for volunteering to coach one of the most important age groups in hockey. At 8U, our goal is not to develop the next NHL player. Our goal is to develop children who love coming to the rink, enjoy learning, and want to play hockey for many years.

The experience a player has at 8U often determines whether they remain in hockey. As a coach, you have the opportunity to make that experience positive, exciting, and memorable.

This guide provides a simple framework for every Junior Hurricanes 8U coach. It is not intended to script every minute of practice. Instead, it provides a consistent approach to teaching that aligns with USA Hockey's American Development Model (ADM) and the Carolina Junior Hurricanes player development philosophy.

Remember: Kids don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Our Mission

Develop skilled hockey players while creating confident young people who enjoy the game and want to return to the rink every week.

Our Philosophy

Every player deserves:

- A positive coach
- Equal opportunities to learn
- A safe environment
- Plenty of puck touches
- **Lots of skating**
- Encouragement
- A smile at the end of practice

At 8U, development is more important than winning.

We measure success by:

- Improvement
- Effort
- Confidence
- Sportsmanship
- Enjoyment

If players leave the rink excited to come back, we have had a successful practice.

Our Development Priorities

1. Fun
2. Skating
3. Puck Skills
4. Hockey Sense
5. Teamwork
6. Competition

Winning is never the primary objective at 8U.

Coaching Standards

Every Junior Hurricanes coach should strive to:

Be Positive - Players learn best when they feel encouraged.

Teach - Correct mistakes while encouraging effort.

Demonstrate - Show every drill. Children learn more from seeing than listening.

Keep Players Moving - Avoid long explanations. Avoid long lines. Avoid standing still.

Encourage Creativity - Allow players to make mistakes. Mistakes are learning opportunities.

Make Hockey Fun - The last five minutes of practice should always leave players smiling.

Practice Standards

Every practice should include:

- Multiple stations
- Short lines (3–4 players maximum)
- Lots of skating, shooting to keep the goalies engaged
- Small Area Games
- Cross-Ice Hockey
- Positive coaching

Coach-to-Player Ratio

32 Skaters and 4 Goalies | 6 Stations | 5-6 Players Per Station

Ideal Staffing

- Lead Instructor
- 4 Head Coaches
- 4–5 Assistant Coaches (assist with pucks, gates, station flow)

Standard Practice Format

Coaches be ready 5 mins before practice begins!

60 Minutes

Time Activity

0:00-5:00 6 lines, full ice skating, focusing on the fundamentals. Basics (long strides, fast starts long strides, single crossover each direction, forward to backwardstransitions, etc. I have plenty of other ideas). There should be very little talkingf rom the coaches in between reps. Line em up, demonstrate clearly, keep the gaps between kids very low…keep “correcting” commentary very brief if at all…let them get the reps in FULL ICE…goal-line to goal-line. Should be the first 15 minutes for the first practice and can come down to 6-8 minutes later in the season…but this is critical for the kids to learn how to skate full ice with pace and develop a stride and glide.

5:00-13:00 Station 1

13:00-21:00 Station 2

21:00-29:00 Station 3

29:00-37:00 Station 4

37:00-45:00 Station 5

45:00-53:00 Station 6

53:00-60:00 Cross-Ice Games - All 3 zones – this is where they learn the game the most. Games should ensure maximum puck touches 3v3 is better than 4v4, 4v4 is better than 5v5 because of puck touches.

Every Practice Includes

- Skating
- Puck Skills
- Passing or Shooting
- Competition
- Decision Making
- Cross-Ice Hockey

Points of Emphasis

Weeks 1-2

Athletic Stance & Balance

Weekly Objective – Develop balance while introducing proper skating posture.

Players should learn:

- Knees bent
- Chest up
- Proper arm movement while skating
- Eyes forward

Weeks 3-4

Forwards Skating

Weekly Objective – Help players develop a long, powerful skating stride.

Weeks 5-6

Edges & Stopping

Weekly Objective – Players begin using their inside and outside edges while learning to stop under control. The emphasis is on balance, body position, and confidence rather than perfect technique.

Key Teaching Points:

- Knees bent
- Weight over the middle of the skates
- Eyes up
- Stop under control
- Balance before speed

Weeks 7-8

Stickhandling

Weekly Objective – Develop puck control while skating. Players should begin carrying the puck without looking down continuously.

Key Teaching Points:

- Soft hands
- Head up
- Top hand away from body
- Move feet while handling

Weeks 9-10

Passing

Weekly Objective – Introduce accurate forehand passing and receiving. While some stationary passing is good to work on the skill, hockey is a game of movement and passing.

Key Teaching Points:

- Point blade toward target
- Sweep through pass
- Present target
- Pass and move, pass and move, pass and move.

Weeks 11-12

Receiving & Give-and-Go

Weekly Objective – Teach players to give/receive passes while moving and support teammates, especially without the puck.

Key Teaching Points:

- Present your stick
- Cushion the puck
- Keep moving
- Pass and support

Coaches' Mid-Season Reminders

Keep Practices Simple - Children remember activities—not speeches.

Demonstrate Everything - Show every drill before it begins.

Rotate Quickly - Eight minutes per station. Keep the pace high.

Every Player Touches a Puck If players are standing, redesign the drill.

Praise Often - Recognize Effort, Improvement,Teamwork, Sportsmanship.

Mid-Season Coaching Notes

Keep Instructions Short - Children remember one correction. Not five.

Ask Questions - Instead of telling players, Ask: "What helped you keep the puck?", "Where was the open ice?", "What could you do differently?"

Celebrate Compete Level - Praise Hustle, Courage, Teamwork, Sportsmanship

Water Breaks - Keep under one minute. Players should never cool down completely.

Station Rotation - Use a whistle every eight minutes. Move immediately. Have the next station prepared before practice begins.

End Every Practice With Hockey - Never finish with conditioning. Finish with games. Players should leave wanting one more shift.

Weeks 13-14

Shooting Fundamentals

Weekly Objective – Introduce proper shooting mechanics while encouraging players to shoot often. Accuracy and technique are more important than power.

Key Teaching Points:

- Hands away from the body
- Weight transfers from back foot to front foot

- Follow through to the target
- Shoot quickly
- Always look for rebounds

Weeks 15-16

Scoring & Shooting in Motion

Weekly Objective – Teach players to attack the net while skating and finish scoring opportunities.

Key Teaching Points:

- Head up approaching the net
- Shoot while moving
- Drive to rebounds
- Continue skating after the shot

Weeks 17-18

1 vs. 1 Play

Weekly Objective – Develop confidence competing with and without the puck. Teach players to attack and defend while maintaining good skating posture.

Key Teaching Points:

- Offense
    - Protect the puck
    - Attack open ice
    - Keep moving
- Defense
    - Stick on puck
    - Stay between player and net
    - Keep feet moving

Weeks 19-20

Support & Transition

Weekly Objective – Players begin recognizing teammates and transitioning quickly from offense to defense.

Key Teaching Points:

- Move after passing
- Support the puck
- Transition immediately
- Stay engaged

Weeks 21-22

Small Area Games & Hockey Sense

Weekly Objective – Allow players to apply the skating and puck skills they have learned in game-like situations. These practices emphasize creativity, decision-making, and fun rather than teaching systems.

Key Teaching Points:

- Play with your head up.
- Move to open ice.
- Move the puck to an open player.
- Compete for loose pucks.
- Support teammates.
- Make quick decisions.

Weeks 23-24

Season Festival

The final two weeks celebrate player development.

Keep practices exciting, competitive, and memorable.

Every player should leave excited for next season.

8U Coaching Promise

As a Carolina Junior Hurricanes coach, I will:

- Put players first.
- Make hockey fun.
- Teach the fundamentals.
- Encourage effort over results.
- Create a positive environment.
- Treat every player with respect.
- Help every child develop a lifelong love for hockey.

Coach Points of Emphasis for Games

Managing the players off-ice (in locker room, between games)

1. Limit the 'early' arrivals…have them get dressed and be ready to go

but not hanging around the locker room for long periods

2. Set expectations with the group and reinforce them throughout the

season…the kids tend to respond to an organized, structured coach.

3. Relentless positivity

Managing the parents

Get an app set up early and communicate around expectations as well as schedule.

Managing the schedule

Work with a team manager to get the schedule for the season squared away early, abiding by rules/regulations on out-of-region play

On-ice Performance

1. Relentless positivity!
2. Encouraging effort is great; making decisions for them is not.
3. We want the kids to develop their skills, habits, and mindset.

They can only do this if they are able to think for themselves, try(repeatedly), and quite often, fail. Therefore, please do not 'joy-stick' coach from the bench. This means we should not be shouting "shoot it," "pass it" or "get it out" from the bench.

We want to instill a culture of COMPETE…kids who compete for themselves and for their teammates. Competing hard and giving 100% effort is the goal. However, winning is NOT the goal…It may (or may not) be a byproduct of competing hard.

We want the kids to play a team game, but that does not mean they should be playing regimented, systems-based hockey. There should not be kids who only play defense or only offense, nor should they be staying in a set area of the ice (e.g. no one has to "stay back"). We want them to experiment, try, fail a lot, and hopefully succeed a bit, in all areas of the ice and all areas of their game. This is how they will develop and grow. We are not try to develop the best kid at dumping the puck in…encourage the kids to make offensive and defensive plays using their skills.

Team hockey is great, but let's not forget it is a good thing for kids to try to make individual plays at this level. Again, they have to be given the freedom to try and fail/succeed on their own.