

U18 Recreation Director Report – Halifax Hawks Minor Hockey Association

Season: 2025/26

Overview of the Season

The 2025/26 U18 Recreation season was an overall success for the Halifax Hawks Minor Hockey Association. The division operated with four teams and continued to emphasize participation, enjoyment, and competitive balance. Feedback from players, parents, and coaches was largely positive, and the structure of the season supported meaningful competition for all participants.

Team Participation and Results

The U18 Recreation division fielded four teams aligned within the Gold, Silver, and Bronze divisional structure. This structure proved effective throughout the season. One team captured the Gold Division championship, while another team won the Silver Division championship.

Introduction of Optional Practices

The 2025/26 season marked the first year that optional practices were offered in the U18 Recreation division. This initiative was well received, with approximately half of the registered players choosing the practice option. Players and families appreciated the opportunity for additional ice time, skill development, and team cohesion.

While successful from a development and engagement perspective, the practice option presented challenges from a team-balancing standpoint. By allowing players to select practice or non-practice at registration, enrolment was effectively divided into groups from the outset, which reduced flexibility when attempting to evenly balance teams.

Roster Size and Goaltending

Larger roster sizes were used on the non-practice teams this season. These rosters were ultimately manageable; however, balancing could have been improved if non-practice players had been assignable to practice teams while simply opting out of practices. This approach is not ideal but would have provided greater flexibility. With only one or two

additional non-practice registrations, this approach would likely have been required to maintain appropriate sized rosters and could be an issue in future seasons.

The larger rosters reduced the need for affiliate players (APs) during the season, which was a positive outcome. The division was also fortunate to have two goaltenders per team, ensuring teams consistently had goaltending coverage. At the U18 level, goaltenders generally prefer not to split games, which resulted in some weeks where individual goalies did not receive game play which is not ideal.

Team Balancing Challenges

Team balancing remains one of the most challenging aspects of managing the U18 Recreation program. Balancing friend requests while striving to build evenly matched teams is particularly difficult. Friend requests are important to the recreational model and player enjoyment but do reduce flexibility during the balancing process.

Attendance inconsistency also impacts competitive balance. Many players at this age participate in multiple sports or hold part-time employment. When stronger or weaker players miss games, their absence can materially affect outcomes and perceived competitiveness.

The balancing process was further challenged by limited attendance at balancing sessions. Several players did not attend any evaluation sessions, requiring reliance on historical knowledge and previous seasons to place them appropriately, which reduces objectivity and accuracy.

Divisional Structure (Gold, Silver, Bronze)

The Gold, Silver, and Bronze divisional format ultimately allowed all teams to remain competitive throughout the season. This structure contributed to close games and helped maintain strong engagement across the division.

Discipline and Coaching Certification

Discipline throughout the season was very good, with limited suspensions and generally positive on-ice behaviour at the U18 level. Coaches largely completed required certifications within expected timelines. In the small number of cases where certification

was delayed, this was due to unavoidable circumstances and was addressed as quickly as possible.

Recommendations for Future Seasons

- Continue to allow friend requests, as playing with friends is critical to enjoyment and long-term retention at the U18 Recreation level.
 - Continue offering optional practices, while reviewing registration and team assignment processes to improve balancing flexibility.
 - Implement a policy that friend requests will not be recognized for any player who does not attend at least one balancing session.
 - Reinforce expectations around balancing session attendance to players and families.
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Conclusion

Overall, the 2025/26 U18 Recreation season was a strong success. The division delivered competitive hockey, introduced a well-received optional practice model, and maintained a clear focus on participation and retention. With minor refinements to roster management and team-balancing processes, the U18 Recreation program is well positioned for continued success in future seasons and could feed the planned U23 team.