



Fort ST James Minor Hockey Association

FSJMHA Fair Ice Policy

The purpose of this briefing is to outline FSJMHA's fair ice policy so all team personnel, parents and players understand the mandate set by the association regarding ice time. To clarify, FSJMHA has chosen the term "fair" as opposed to "equal" in defining our policy as our intent is to provide a fair opportunity for all players to participate while recognizing the challenge of ensuring absolutely equal ice time to all players in all situations and all levels.

There are a number of factors that can impact ice time and it is important to know what those are to ensure the policy is properly understood and applied as required.

FSJMHA's Fair Ice Policy Encompasses the Following Key Principles:

1. FSJMHA is committed to having as many players as possible play at a level of competition suited to their skills and abilities.
2. All players will receive fair ice time. No coach will sit a player for any duration unless it is for the reasons set below.
3. With the exception of Midget Carded and Bantam Carded, goalies at all levels will receive fair ice time. Noting the prior exceptions, no goalie will sit for two or more games unless for disciplinary reasons, and or with approval from the Executive Council.
**At the Midget Carded and Bantam Carded levels a goalie may play 2 or more consecutive games. If this happens, the sitting goalie will be entitled to equitable additional future games within one month of the extra sitting.
4. Any player may miss ice time for misconduct and or for disciplinary reasons.

What does "Fair Ice" mean to FSJMHA?

With few exceptions (as noted below) fair ice is quite simply defined as the *attempt* to provide equal ice – coaches must strive to ensure all players receive the same amount of playing time in a game, be it exhibition, league or tournament. Essentially this means an equal rotation of forward lines and defense pairing and similar shift lengths for each. FSJMHA acknowledges that registration fees are the same for all players within a division, that hockey is a healthy form of recreation, and all players have the right to the same amount of playing time.

FSJMHA considers fair ice a core component of a team – regardless of individual skill level all of individual skill level all players are part of the team, and as such should be provided an equal opportunity to develop and contribute to the success of the team. Years of education and history has proven that a commitment to fair ice time improves all aspects of team building and team play.

What is Fair Play for Atom, Novice and Tykes levels?

Plain and Simple – Equal opportunity for everyone – EVERY GAME!

What are acceptable reasons for coaches to deviate from the Fair Ice Policy?

As described below, a player's ice time can be reduced for disciplinary reasons.

Repeated penalties involving risk of injury (e.g. checking from behind or to the head, cross check, slash, etc), and "bad taste" penalties (e.g. unsportsmanlike, roughing after the play, etc) may be considered disciplinary reasons to sit a player for a period of time as decided by the coach. Duration must be dependent on, and directly proportional to, the behaviour. For example, a "bad taste" penalty could result in sitting for a single shift, whereas disrespectful behaviour toward team personnel or a teammate could result in sitting for the remainder of a game.

It is also expected and understood that there will be practical instances throughout the season where ice time will be different amongst players in any given game. FSJMHA expects the "spirit" of the fair ice policy to be adhered to, but we will also give consideration to the following:

- Some teams may have more players playing the forward position than defense position. While teams at younger aged divisions are encouraged to rotate players through positions, teams at older divisions normally have players in set positions for the season. In this instance, the defensive players will obviously have more playing time than the forward players (and for that matter, a single goalie on a team will have the most playing time).
- For games with numerous penalties, line rotations can sometimes be difficult to organize or maintain, and because of these circumstances it's not uncommon for some players to arbitrarily end up with more, or less, playing time due to the imbalance caused by the penalty situation.
- Depending on the skill level of the opposing team, players can sometimes get "boxed in" to their defensive end or, alternatively, generate sustained pressure in the offensive zone. Both of these situations can make it difficult to change lines within the expected shift lengths set by the coach. (e.g. 1-minute shifts etc).

- If a team is tied or ahead/behind by a goal, one strategy that coaches often draw upon is to “shorten the bench” to protect a lead or attempt to tie/win a game. In other words coaches may play the more skilled defense or forward players an EXTRA SHIFT or TWO, WITHIN THE LAST FIVE MINUTES OF THE THIRD PERIOD, to achieve the desired outcome. While FSJMHA understands this strategy and will allow the coach some latitude in the last 5 minutes of a close, important game, we also expect our coaches to have a number of strategies to draw upon to defend a lead or tie/win game. They are encouraged to not solely rely on the strategy of “shortening the bench” every time.
- If a coach expects to use this strategy during the season, he/she is strongly encouraged to: have a discussion with parents/players at the beginning of the season so it is clear that should such a decision be made, it’s for the net benefit of the team; to wait until the second half of the season to determine if it’s even a strategy that would truly benefit the team; to utilize different players throughout the season; to ensure at no time does any player feel ostracized by the strategy if it’s used.

Competitive Level:

Pee Wee, Bantam, and Midget teams’ coaches will sometimes use a line matching strategy against other teams. This tactic should be allowed for coaches however this should not be done until after December and only in crucial games (finals of tournaments, playoff placement etc.) Special teams are also an important area of the game at this level. Coaches may have set power play lines 1 and 2 and penalty kill lines 1 and 2. We recommended utilizing different players for on these specialty teams (powerplay vs penalty kill) as this allows all players to be utilized and be a part of special team situations.

What are unacceptable reasons for coaches to deviate from the fair ice policy?

Acknowledging that ice time can vary amongst players for the reasons noted above, the following are examples where coaches are not allowed to purposely reduce ice time in any game:

- If the team is behind one or more goals in the first or second period, or in the third period with more than five minutes to play in the game.
- If the team is on a power-play or penalty kill. (Any team below the Pee Wee level)
- If a player misses one or more practices, games or team events. A meeting with the Executive Head Coach, team staff, and parents is to take place to find a resolution before ice time is reduced.
- If a player arrives late to a game or forgets a piece of equipment.
- If a player appears disengaged in the game or makes a “bad play”.

Most minor hockey players do not drive themselves to the arena; therefore it is unfair to discipline a player for the mistake or error of the parent. We expect coaches to consider all circumstances before reducing ice time to and understand that players will not always be at their best and that they will make mistakes. This is the “coachable moment” for corrections and players cannot miss ice time or be sat because of it.

What to do if you have concerns regarding ice time?

First and foremost, take 24 hours to consider your concerns. Some questions to consider that can be helpful are:

- Did my child mention this? Is my child upset?
- Is it a "one off" where the coach simply made an error?
- Has it happened repeatedly and if so, what are the circumstances in which it happens?
- What do you believe the intent of the coach was?

If after 24 hours, you still have concerns, ask to speak to the coach. Please remember that the coaches also have full time jobs and families, so please ensure your request provides options of times to meet or to talk on the phone if that is the only option available. If your request is made over the phone, please do not expect that the discussion will take place immediately as it may not be a suitable time.

Please do not approach any member of the coaching staff immediately following a game to discuss ice time issues. In all cases the 24 hour rule applies.

FSJMHA is very fortunate to have a number of dedicated and skilled coaches in our association that openly welcome and encourage questions and/or the opportunity to discuss concerns. The work of a coach is very busy during a game, and it may simply be the case he/she was unaware there are inequalities in ice time (particularly for newer coaches). The coach deserves an opportunity to discuss the situation in a mutually respectable manner. If an inequality did indeed exist, then the coach also deserves an opportunity to address the matter and make necessary corrections.

If the outcome of your conversation does not adequately address your concerns please contact the Executive Head Coach, he/she can arrange a meeting with you and the coach to further discuss the situation, or meet separately with the coach if required. He/she can also draw upon other executive members (e.g. Coach Coordinator, Vice Presidents, President) as may be needed.

"This is something that our child might enjoy and continue to participate in as a lifetime activity or interest, for its physical, mental and social benefits. If they continue to love the activity and participate as an adult, it will have been well worth the investment. If by slim chance this is their gift then this will be their opportunity to see it realized. If they do not enjoy it, they will move on to other things and be richer for the overall experience."