

Hockey Alberta/Paralympic Sports Association - “Sledges in Schools” Program

As part of Hockey Canada’s “Best Practices” section of its sledge hockey development website, the following information is intended to serve as an example of a program where students are taught the basics of sledge hockey in a school setting. The program is to be conducted on ice, and the key to the success of the program described below is ensuring that a qualified individual/coach teaches the program and conducts the demonstration.

Protective equipment should always be worn, and helmet use is mandatory in sledge hockey.

The information below is a guideline only designed to share information about programming that has been put in place by Hockey Alberta. The potential exists for other branches to create similar programs.

CONDUCTING A SLEDGE HOCKEY DEMONSTRATION

This is a general guideline intended to assist you in putting on your own demonstration to a class or group.

Set-up

Assemble the sledges on the ice in a semi-circle with the sticks resting on the sledges. Depending on the nature of the sledges you may have the flexibility to adjust the size. If the sledges are adjustable and the class size is large, it is recommended that a general size be chosen for the sledge.

Get the students to pair up so that there is an even number of groups as sledges (i.e. if there are 12 sledges and 24 kids, get into 12 groups of two). Ensure that all of the students are wearing the proper equipment. In accordance with most school guidelines this includes a helmet. “Sledges in Schools” guidelines recommend that individuals wear gloves, hockey gloves being preferable; however large winter gloves would be acceptable. Please check your school or club requirements before conducting a demonstration. A “Sledges in Schools” demonstration requires the same provisions as a school ice skating or hockey session for liability.

The Preparation Talk

Have the students line up behind their sledges, without sitting in them (as they often will not listen after that point). This section is used to give a brief background on:

- why an individual would use a sledge (a physical disability preventing them from being able to skate). Depending on the class and interest a bit of background can be given on disabilities. The focus here being that all individuals should have the chance to do any activity that they choose regardless of ability, and with the right equipment - any sport is possible.
- a brief background of sledge hockey, Paralympics and Canada’s National Sledge Team.
- safety! This is the most important point in the preparation talk. Please ensure that students do realize that they are playing with equipment that does have the ability to injure if not used properly. There are three primary areas of concern:
 - **skate blades underneath the sledges:** if your sledge tips on its side, always have your hand on the top of the seat, by your leg, to help push to get you back sitting. Never put your hand under the sledge!
 - **picks on the ends of the sticks:** the picks also have to be paid attention to when playing, especially near classmates. Never lift them or tilt them so that the pick may come in contact with another student!
 - **T-boning:** Finally, there is a penalty in sledge hockey called T-boning. The reason we like to bring peoples attention to this is that it is a safety issue. When two sledges collide in a T, the design of the sledges can allow one sledge to ride over another, posing an injury risk to the leg. At all costs, avoid running into another individual in a T.

Getting in the Sledges

Now have the students get into the sledges. Depending on the type of sledge, different seat and foot straps will be used. Regardless of type, the straps need to be done up tight. A sledge is your skates; loose laces on skates will be difficult to skate with as will a loose seat belt in sledge hockey. Now we will try skating ... but first a few words on moving the sledge, turning, shooting and stopping.

Moving the Sledge - using the two pick ends of the sticks, pick with both sticks at the same time using a pulling motion to pick the ice and pull through. Keeping your hands close to your body will make picking easier. Holding the stick higher up near the blades and reaching forward will give a greater stride and less work. Also make sure that the sticks are held with the blades curving inwards.

Turning - Turning can be done in a number of ways. The easiest way for beginners is to pick more with the side you want to turn towards and put a fist on the ice using it as a pivot point. A more developed player will actually shift their weight to one side and turn on one skate blade.

Shooting / Puck Handling - A player will hold the sticks in their hands with the picks down to be able to skate, when the shooting end of the stick is needed it is simply tilted onto the ice and the blade is ready. Sledge hockey players learn to use both sticks and can shoot with either hand. When handling the puck, instead of always pushing the puck forward and chasing it, have the student practice passing under their legs as they are moving forward around people / pylons. Also, instead of always trying to stop the puck with the blade, often the players will stop it by placing their fist, stick in hand flat on the ice, which covers a larger surface area and then guide the puck ahead of them, making it easier to control.

Stopping - As you will soon note, it is not easy to get a stationary sledge moving, and that is why sledge hockey players will try and redirect their motion rather than stop. However, stopping is still a necessary task. For beginners, there are 2 easy ways to teach stopping (the more advanced ways are not recommended to be taught as there is greater chance of injury). The first way is to simply drag the knuckles of your gloves on the ice to slow you down. The second way is to tuck the sticks underneath the sledge and pull up slightly. This will get the back part of the blades on the sledge to cut into the ice and create a more defined stop.

This is a good opportunity to give the students an opportunity to try the various skills, allowing time for both groups of students to try. Depending on the level of abilities and interest in the class this can be a limited time or extended period.

Drills

There are a number of drills that can be done to practice the basic skills of sledge hockey. To make the transition easier from sharing sledges, have the students alternate after a drill or time segment, with the goal of time management being to maximize the time in the sledge and minimize the time changing back and forth with the partner. A general guideline for drills is outlined, however depending on the age level of the students, will depend on the type and quantity of drills that you do.

1. Falling over and getting back upright - not so much of a drill as a skill that needs to be practiced. Remember, be aware where your hand and fingers are at all time, beware of the skate blades.
2. Relay type drills. Having the students race from blue line to blue line and back. Note: blue lines are suggested as it provides the students time to turn around without running into the boards. It is hard on a sledge frame to hit the boards head on. This can be a fun drill to do with both partners by having them as a team, with the first individual racing from blue line to blue line and back, helping the other partner get in the sledge and completing the same blue-line-to-blue-line-and-back relay.
3. Passing / Puck Handling - There are many types of passing and puck handling that can be done, mostly depending on age of students. One example could be to have the students line up on the red line and blue line, facing each other, and pass the puck to each other. For puck handling, the students could skate with the puck from blue line to blue line as a drill.

4. Shooting Drills - Have the students line up in a semi-circle around the net, with either targets or a goalie, and take turns shooting.

Game Play

It is fun to divide the group into two teams and play a fun scrimmage. In sledge hockey the teams are comprised the same way as regular hockey with six players per side, including a goaltender. A goalie is also on a sledge and will situate him/herself sideways to cover a greater surface area of the net. A goalie will also wear the standard blocker and trapper. The only difference is that the trapper will have picks on it to help them use that hand to move as they only have the one modified goalie stick.