

The High School Hockey Program Cycle

Isn't it amazing?

You live in a community. You have done well for yourself and can afford a private school education. Your child is proficient in a sport or art, and you want to give them a good experience to enjoy that activity. You are aware of the options in your area, and you look at them with your child. Of course, as a parent, you steer them toward choices you believe are better for them.

The reputation of the schools you are looking at plays a big part in your decision making. The reputation of the activities plays a big part in the decision making. The history and successes of the athletic program for athletes and the arts programs for creatives and music for music students all play a large role in why you would choose to offer the option for your child to go to a particular school.

You narrow this list down to the schools with the attributes and reputation that matter to you and to your child.

You visit the school with your child on open house type days.

Your child does a shadow day.

Your child does a get to know the program or school thing with the program at the school that aligns with their interest.

You find a school with a hockey program, for example, that has a history of happy players and parents, on ice success on a fairly regular basis (and more so than other programs in your area). Your child enjoys the time he spends with the coaches and other players in the program. The coach has been with the program for close to 20 years. That stability means something to the success and gives you comfort in the program. The school's support for that coach means something and gives you comfort. It meets all the criteria, and your child enrolls in that school.

As a freshman, the player is on JV and makes friends. Things are great, and there are really no expectations other than enjoying the sport and adjusting to high school. The player gets better and enjoys his coaches and teammates. Mostly anyway, like most sports, it's not always sunshine. Parents are generally happy, as are players.

As a sophomore, your player thinks he has a shot at varsity and is disappointed when he is not selected. As a parent, you are disappointed and start thinking that maybe the coaches are not very good. The coaches should be developing your player better. The school should be more involved in helping your player get better. Meanwhile, your player didn't take any consistent initiative to get better over the summer. Your player skipped a lot of in season training because he was tired or had homework, the same homework all his teammates had, and found a way to train and do schoolwork. You start talking to other parents about the coaching and how the new freshmen just aren't as good as your player, and how it is affecting your player and the team. Just a reminder that the sophomore parents from your child's freshman year said the same

things about your child. The season ends without a championship, and you and your child may feel like you expected more. Or maybe it is just you as a parent.

As a junior, your child fully expects to be on varsity. You expect him to be on varsity because he is an upperclassman. You see an opening for new club board members and are encouraged to apply. You become part of the board. You want the best for your child (versus the program as a whole), and you push policies and actions that maximize your child's chances of being part of the varsity team. It is obvious to you that the coaches must either change their approach or be changed out altogether. The reputation that you and your child signed up for was to be part of a championship winning program and team. And that has not happened in your two years with the club, so something must be wrong. That wrong thing must be the coaches. It is definitely not your child, your approach, or your support. That reputation that the current nearly 20 year coach established and maintained must be just history and cannot possibly be continued. He's probably out of touch and needs to be replaced. He hasn't kept pace with new ideas and probably isn't open to new thinking.

Meanwhile, you and your child don't meet the standards the program requires. So you want to change the rules and standards to fit your child. You work around the person with the history, the ability, the relationships, the knowledge, to fix whatever is stopping your child from meeting your 8th grade expectations for him. You fight the coach on coaching decisions. You ask to get the school involved, as if the school wants to deal with a parent over the person who has been there for nearly 2 decades. You say things your child overhears that influence his play and relationship with his coaches.

All the while, the coach who has been there nearly 20 years goes through this every two years on a predictable, repeatable cycle.

The junior year ends with your player being happy and satisfied. The hockey friends are his social friends. They go to dances together. Their girlfriends are friends. They play Xbox, golf, go to movies, and hang out together. They get in trouble together and cover for each other. They help each other in school classes. It's a squad.

It's senior summer, and you and your child are worried about college. He gets into great shape to make sure he is ready for his fall sport. He shows up to tryouts in good form and does well. He pushes younger players to commit to training on and off ice. He wishes he had done that more as a sophomore and junior. You still push from a board position, but see now that what is offered is what you want. And what the player takes away is what they earned. It is up to them to be great, and for the coaches to provide that environment. You won't say it out loud, but you wish you had been more supportive and less critical of the program. You now see what makes it work and why 20 years of knowledge and capability create a program with winning teams every single year. You try to steer new families, but really, you don't get that involved anymore. You just want to savor the experience of your child's senior year. He participates, he plays, he has fun with the team, the coaches, and his friends. The program isn't perfect, but you see the opportunities, and you hope the child has learned and grown from the experience.

You are grateful for his hockey friends and those parents (mostly anyway). The season ends, and you have one last banquet to enjoy. The banquet reminds you that the winning was there the whole time. You just thought the only score that mattered was on the scoreboard. You shed some tears and share some hugs. You never see most of those parents again. Your child keeps some of the friends as they go to college, and some become social media only acquaintances. But they will always be teammates, and they will always be there for each other. And the program moves on. And you watch from a distance, remembering everything. You hope it keeps going the way you remember it. And the new parents are all calling for change.