

Playing Divisions & Mite/8U Program

APPROVED BY

Hockey Operations Committee (HOC)

EFFECTIVE DATE

2026-27

DATE APPROVED

July 13th, 2026

Playing Divisions

STMAYHA playing divisions are determined by the player's age as of the cutoff date as mandated by Minnesota Hockey. Ages are determined by a player's age on the date of June 1st for that upcoming year. The current playing divisions can be found on the Minnesota Hockey Website.

Mite/8U Program

The Mite/8U program is the foundation of the entire STMAYHA development pipeline. If we want elite players at Bantam/15U, the work starts here. This is not daycare on skates. It is a structured, age-appropriate development program designed to build the physical and competitive foundation that every skill above it depends on.

Development Focus: Three Priorities

At the Mite/8U level, brain development limits a player's ability to recognize complex patterns and execute multi-step reads. That is normal and expected. What this age group *can* do is build motor patterns that become permanent. The three development priorities at this level are:

1. **Skating Skills.** Edge work, crossovers, stops, starts, transitions, backward skating, and balance. This is the single most important investment at this age. A player who can skate will learn everything else faster.
2. **Stick Skills.** Stickhandling, passing, and receiving in age-appropriate progressions. The emphasis is on comfort with the puck and hand-eye coordination, not advanced techniques.
3. **Competitive Skills.** Learning to compete, to battle for pucks, to play with intensity and purpose. Small-area games and 1-on-1 battles teach players to compete before they are asked to execute systems.

How the Mite/8U Program Connects to the Pipeline

Players who exit the Mite/8U program should be competent skaters with developing stick skills and a competitive mindset. This is the entry point for the four-pillar model. At Squirt/10U, skating and skill foundations built at the Mite/8U level allow coaches to introduce Hockey IQ development (reads, decisions, game understanding) and deepen culture development (coachability, competitiveness, character). Without the Mite/8U foundation, the pipeline above it breaks.

Program Rules

- All players shall have equal ice time during games.
- During Mite/8U games, there shall be one coach from each team on the ice at all times. There shall be no more than four coaches on the bench for each team.
- No individual scoring statistics will be kept. The emphasis shall be on team play, allowing all players to handle the puck and experience each position.
- Games will be played on half-ice sheets or full ice, determined by Minnesota Hockey rules and regulations.
- No scores or standings will be recorded or displayed on the scoreboard, unless a team is taking part in a scored tournament.
- In most cases there are no referees and no penalties.