

# Back to Hockey

## Creating a great player experience



ENGLAND  
HOCKEY

As the organiser of the sessions you have a key role in creating a great experience for players attending your sessions. Within this document you will receive lots of hints and tips, hearing directly from clubs who have run successful sessions and from insight from Back to Hockey players.

Due to the increased success of Back to Hockey clubs now not only run sessions for women but men and even 'mixed' sessions for both men and women.

*"Focus on the aim of the sessions. They are for new and returning players, not existing ones! Keep the sessions light and fun and invite friendly club members (ideally previous Back to Hockey players) to the sessions to show all abilities are able to play."* Chris, Bicester Hockey Club

### Attending for the first time can be daunting

Going along to a hockey session for the first time in years can be daunting, this is a message we hear time and time again especially from women returning to the sport.

- Making people feel welcome and reassured even before they arrive at your sessions will help with their confidence.
- Inform players of what they should bring with them; sports clothes, trainers, water, shin guards and let them know if they are able to borrow a stick – some players might not wish to buy a stick initially until they decide whether they want to continue playing so it's worth having some spares!
- Provide them with information around what to expect from the sessions and reinforce that the players attending are likely to be in the same position as them having not played before or for a long period of time.
- Invite other club players or Back to Hockey players along to the sessions. Clubs have found that this works really well to make players feel even more welcome.
- Make sure your coaches are friendly and understand the types of players who will be attending.
- When players arrive, make them feel welcome and get to know who they are! Also make sure you give the group time to know each other. This could be through fun warm up games like stuck in the mud.

### Adding the 'Golden Thread' into your sessions

You may or may not already have heard of the 'Golden Thread'. It is the most effective way of developing a great player experience through fun, game-like activities rather than repetitive drills.

Games or game-like activity should be an essential focus of each session rather than just played at the end. This allows players to develop skills, 'game sense', and an understanding of the rules and tactics to play really good hockey. However, we're not delivering game-like activities for game's sake. The skill of the coach is to identify the skill related problem (area for development) and then think creatively about the best way to exaggerate the problem and create high volumes of repetition in a variable, game-like environment - think of it as 'repetition without repetition'!

## Back to Hockey – Creating a great player experience

To ensure we develop players and design really good practice sessions, a Golden Thread (the 'how' of practice design) has been developed. The Golden Thread should run through virtually every coaching session.



### Sessions for women

#### What are players looking for from the sessions?

Female Back to Hockey players have told us that they want sociable, informal sessions where they become more confident about their hockey skills, improve their fitness and have the opportunity to play small sided games.

*“Before I went I had no idea what my standard would be, I didn’t know if I would remember how to hold a stick, I liked that the sessions went really back to square one and we started on the basics.*

*We have matches during our sessions that they are a really good way to consolidate all the skills that we’ve been practicing.”* Hannah, a Back to Hockey player from Wakefield Hockey Club

- Players love the social nature of hockey and this sets Back to Hockey sessions apart from individual sports. Enable players to spend time socialising with their friends during and after sessions. At Alderley Edge Hockey Club the players have cake and coffee after their sessions and this is very much an integral part to the overall player experience.
- Female Back to Hockey players have told us that they enjoy having time during sessions to learn basic skills i.e. how to push, receive and move with the ball. Just like regular club training these skills can be practiced through games for understanding as opposed to lots of ‘drill’ led activity.
- In addition to learning new skills players love to practice the things they have learnt in small sided games.
- As players progress and become more confident a growing number of Back to Hockey clubs are organising small sided games against other local clubs. We can let you know which other clubs in your local area are currently running Back to Hockey sessions if this is something you would like to organise.

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### Sessions for men

Our insight tells us that the time scale between women last playing hockey and starting Back to Hockey sessions is on average between 15 and 20 years. In the case of male Back to Hockey players early indicators suggest that the gap is far less and is more likely to be around 3-10 years.

There are also likely to be situational differences between men and women around what environment they last played the sport prior to Back to Hockey sessions. Insight suggests that men returning to the sport are more likely to have played previously within a club environment.

Inviting lapsed players back to your club to play socially on an informal level could be a great way to get them/keep them involved. Understanding what your players (male or female) are looking for from your sessions will enable you to tailor them accordingly.

### What are players looking for from the sessions?

- They want to play! Less coaching and more facilitating of small sided games.
- They like the social side. Encourage the group to go for a beer post session.
- If their schedule allows, men are more likely to want to transition into regular club sessions sooner than women.

### Delivering mixed sessions for both men and women

In some cases clubs have decided to deliver Back to Hockey sessions for both men and women. These sessions can be a great opportunity for family and friends to take part in sessions together.

- When delivering sessions for both men and women it's really important that all players feel included. Women in particular who haven't played the sport for a long period of time could be daunted by taking part in sport alongside players they deem to be physically stronger.
  - Ensure teams and groups are balanced in order to keep all players engaged and having fun.
  - Throughout the session gain regular feedback from the players so you understand what they enjoy or want to try. This will also help when planning next week's session.

