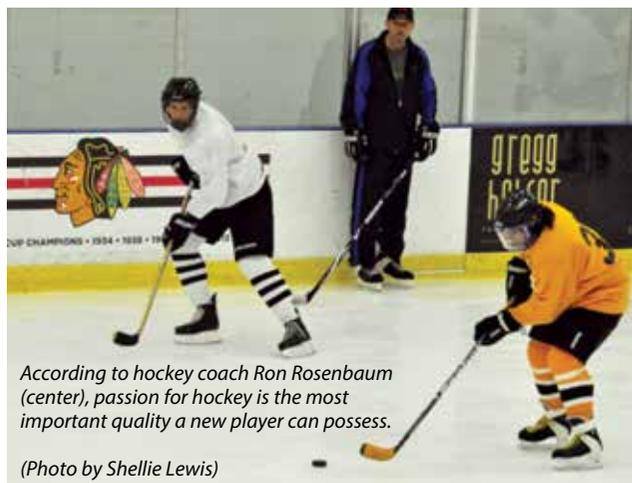


# Five Things Every New Adult Player Should Know

By Sal J. Barry | *The Hockey Noob*

At the ripe old age of 38, I decided that I was going to learn how to play hockey. Sure, 38 doesn't qualify me for an AARP membership. But by this age, most pro athletes have either retired, are thinking about retiring, or are an athletic demigod like Chris Chelios. So taking up hockey a few years shy of 40 seems like a tremendous challenge.

Yet, that hasn't stopped many adults without prior experience from getting into the sport. Hockey has grown rapidly among adults in Illinois over the past half-decade. From 2008-09 to 2012-13, the number of adults (19 and over) registered with USA Hockey has increased from 5,767 to 7,950 players -- a growth of 27.5%. Almost 16% of those who registered did so in the past year alone. Plus, that doesn't account for non-registered players. Not all ice rinks require participants to register with USA Hockey, so the actual number of adult players is higher.



According to hockey coach Ron Rosenbaum (center), passion for hockey is the most important quality a new player can possess.

(Photo by Shellie Lewis)

Many people are becoming students of the game later on in their life. I did, and so can you. Here are five things you should know if you decide to transition from hockey spectator to hockey player.

## 1. Understand the financial commitment

"New students need to know what the expense of the game is," says Ken Rzepcki, a coach at Johnny's Ice House in Chicago. He has taught adults how to play for the past 15 years. "[Know] what the commitment is financially."

Hockey is perhaps the most expensive team sport to play. Skates alone can cost you several hundred dollars, and those are just the lower-end models. Protective gear can also be pricey, but like skates gear will last you a very long time. Hockey sticks are another story. I was out \$50 after the blade of my stick accidentally got stuck under the Zamboni door and broke during a battle in the corner for the puck.

However, ice time will be the single greatest cumulative expense you incur as a player. Hockey lessons usually average \$20 an hour. When you start playing in a league, you'll spend between \$15 to \$25 per game. Some rinks may require you to join USA Hockey, which will add another \$50 per year to your hockey habit. Make no mistake about it, hockey is not cheap.

## 2. Many skills are necessary

"Hockey is the hardest sport to play," says Ron Rosenbaum, a coach at Johnny's Ice House who has taught adults since 2006. "It isn't the easiest to skate when you are first learning."

Fortunately, there are cost-efficient ways to practice skating, such as going to public skate sessions. During the winter months, frozen park grounds can be a good source of free ice

time to work on your skating basics.

Making hockey even more daunting, though, is that skating and stick handling aren't the only demands. You need lots of stamina to play hockey, as I found out the hard way during my first several in-class scrimmages. Core strength and flexibility are also vital -- not only for movement, but for preventing injuries. Good skating and stick work are important, but physical fitness is necessary for success on the ice.

## 3. Make sure your skates fit properly

Properly-fitting skates sounds like a no-brainer, but you'd be surprised. Many people who think about learning how to play are tempted to cut corners when faced with spending \$300 or more on hockey skates. Suddenly, buying used skates in a size a too big (or too small, if they can bear it) seems like a good option. It isn't.

"The most important piece of equipment

an adult has is their skates, and those have to be fitted properly," says Rzepcki. "Skates that are too big are going to hinder your learning because you don't have the ankle support necessary. They are dangerous because you are not on blades that [properly] fit your body."

## 4. You will need to become a night owl

Most other athletic activities, from martial arts to yoga, have adult-friendly time slots in the late afternoon or evening hours. Hockey for adults is a different story. Indoor ice rinks will never be as abundant as health clubs and are always

in demand. Adult hockey is a lower priority at most rinks. Activities like figure skating, youth hockey games and public skate have their run of the rink before the beer leaguers get their turn.

Taking a lesson at 9:30 p.m. on a weeknight or hitting the ice for a league game at 11 p.m. on a Sunday is not uncommon. Even worse is when the game prior to the one you are in yours runs longer than planned, delaying the start time of your own game -- and your eventual bedtime. Try to plan a nap on a game day, or sometime the next day, to make up for getting only four hours of sleep. And don't forget to brag to your coworkers that you were up past midnight playing hockey. That makes you sound hardcore, even though you didn't have much of a choice.

## 5. Passion trumps all

Ability will take you only so far -- granted, some further than others. That's when your passion for hockey kicks in. "You have to want to play this game," Rosenbaum says. "Passion for hockey is important because you always want to continue learning, to keep forging ahead when you don't think you can do it."

That doesn't mean you should play every practice, scrimmage or match like it is Game Seven of the Stanley Cup Finals. But nothing about starting hockey is particularly easy, so you will have to find motivation when the going gets rough.

"Fall down, get back up, keep striding forward," says Rosenbaum. "Passion rules knowledge."

Sal J. Barry is a freelance writer from Chicago who is learning how to play hockey. Check out his blog, *The Hockey Noob*, at [ChicagoNow.com/Hockey-Noob](http://ChicagoNow.com/Hockey-Noob). Contact him at [sjb@puckjunk.com](mailto:sjb@puckjunk.com) or on Twitter @puckjunk.



## Central States Developmental Hockey League Team of the Week

### Naperville Sabres Midget Major



Since summer workouts began, Naperville Sabres Midget major coach Chris Chelios' players have understood, very clearly, what the team goal is, "play as hard as you can, and do the best that you can as a team, every game".

It seems simple, but it has worked for the Sabres as they have climbed to the top of the midget major Central States leader board with an 18-2-2 mark, good enough for first place and this week's CSDHL Team of the Week honoree.

"All season we have found a way to win as a team," said Chelios.

Chelios loves how the CSDHL offers his team a challenge every time it plays a league opponent.

"You never get a night off," he said.

And the sports cliché "Teamwork makes the dream work" is starting to be the Sabres rallying cry as the season comes to a close with CSDHL playoffs slated for next weekend in St Louis. Following the league playoffs, the Sabres will then prepare for the end-of-season Blackhawk tournament

to crown the Illinois champion and a trip to the USA Hockey National Tournament for the winning team.

Leading the way for the balanced Sabre attack has been forward Andrew Patzin and Steven Quinn. Overall the team has an impressive 23-7-5 mark. But looming ahead in the CSDHL tournament are local rivals Highland Park Falcons and Chicago Bruins as well as defending National Champion Affton Americans, the steppingstone to further success according to Chelios.

There is no doubt, the Sabres will certainly be up for the challenge.

The Sabre Midget Major CSDHL players are Jonathon Moskaluk, Mike Martel, Steven Quinn, Riley Doyle, Ross Purpura, Jason Bielke, Marc Shipbaugh, Tyler Strutz, Chris Rounds, Zach Bugajski, Eric Svejda, Johnny Lehmann, Alec Paloumpis, Kyle Stasny, Michael O'Hara, Mike Lyons, Drew Patzin, Connor Robbs and Brad Wood.

The team is coached by Chris Chelios, Andy Kokasa and Joe Patzin. Team manager is Jolene Martel.

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