

Navigating the Utah Travel Team Tryout Waters

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This flyer was put together to offer a few words of advice and questions to ask as you decide whether competitive hockey is right for your family, and if so, which organization might provide the best fit. As the Lightning Program Coordinator, this is written with a bit of a Lightning bias, but in the end I think this will help you ask the right questions to help you make the best decision for your family.

I have been contacted by all the local travel organizations about my kid! They must really want me!

Well, yes and no. This is called casting a wide net. Organizations want to expose their program to as many families as they can. We all know there are many choices, so the more kids that are at tryouts the better the chances are the team will be filled with quality players. Be aware of organizations that refuse to cut players. While its nice to accommodate everyone, the addition of extra teams due to high tryout numbers often creates a group of players that is not ready for competitive hockey.

The more money we spend the better the results

In my experience I have not seen this be entirely true. While many organizations have some nifty bells and whistles that come along with the program, the more you spend does not necessarily correlate with success. Most private skating and goalie coaches will take your money whether you are part of the organization or not. Ask yourself if the money saved by playing with a less expensive organization can be spent on private instruction? Ask the organization to see the budget for the program. Ask if it correlates to what is being advertised. Most importantly, take moment to define what success means to your family. Is success measured in wins, goals, the quality of friendships that develop, or quality life lessons learned? Figuring out what you want out of a competitive hockey experience will go a long way toward figuring out the best fit is for you family.

The Sales Pitch and questions to ask

This is your best chance to ask questions and call BS. Here are a few things to consider:

- At the tryout, do they know who their coaching staff is for the next season? If so, what do you know about them? Watch them at the tryouts. Watch how they interact with the players and parents in the hallway. Ask past parents about how their seasons went. Did the player like the coach? Did he set an example you want set for your child? Did they get better as the season went on? Did the team regress? What was their behavior like when traveling?
- Do they show stability in their coaching staff? Is it a new crew every year?
- Can they give you a full season practice schedule? Do they know when and where the practices will be?
- Can they give you an outline of tournaments?
- What are the core values of the program? Do they have any? Do they line up with your goals for your child?
- Find out about the reputation of the coach and the organization. Ask past parents who have been in the program. Don't take the organization's word for it. Investigate!!
- Check the history of the organization. Do they show stability, a reputation for integrity, fair play for all players?
- Do they take anyone that will write a check? Do they put more than 15 players on a roster? If so, ask why?
- Are they making promises that seem unethical or in the realm of used car sales? For example, your child will be the 2nd line center. Or, if you sign, he can be the Captain! Really? They know that already? Chances are they want your check to fill the team. Beware of teams that seem to be centered around 1 or 2 players.
- Are they putting pressure on you to sign a contract before you leave the tryout? Why? Frankly, if they are not offering your child a spot on their top level team, then they can wait. The spot will be there in a month. If they say no it won't be, do you want to give an organization your time and money that asks you sign before you get a chance to think about it?

Should I let my child decide what team to play on?

This is a tough one. It is very easy for a child to be impressed with the bling and excitement of tryout weekend. As we all know, kids make decisions quickly and emotionally. You should value your child's desires, but also make your decision based on what you know about the program, the coach, the schedule, level of play, cost, traveling, etc.

Final words of advice

You and your child are about to embark on a youth hockey journey that for all intents and purposes will end when they are 18 years old. When it is over, I hope you and your child will look back on this journey and be able to say that you both had fun, you both grew as a family, that you learned important values about life, team work, sportsmanship, fair play, and respect. They decisions you make in the new few months will set you down that path. These are important decisions. Make them with your best intentions for your child's future growth and development. Hockey is simply a vessel to help our young men and women grow to be mature, responsible, self-reliant adults. See hockey for what it is, not for what you dream it to be for your child! Good luck!