

Programming and Scheduling for Ice Arenas

by Bob Bebber

In order to obtain maximum revenue in an ice arena, management must seek to provide a “balanced schedule.” This is sometimes difficult as special interest groups pursue contracting as many prime hours as are available. Prime hours can be defined as weekdays between 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. and on weekends between 8:00 a.m. and 10:00 p.m.

A “balanced schedule” will provide consistent revenue on a year-round basis and continue to build your programs with a new influx of skaters.

In a new rink it is much easier to control and program your facility schedule from the very beginning. The first priority should be public skating sessions. These should be scheduled at times when the general public is most likely to be seeking entertainment during their leisure hours, such as Friday and Saturday evenings and Saturday and Sunday afternoons. It is also a good idea to offer after school hours at least twice a week, such as on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 4:00-5:30 p.m.

The length of public skating sessions can vary from 90 minutes to three hours. The important thing to remember is that your public skating sessions are the key to building success in your other program areas. While your public skaters are at the arena they should have access to materials that promote learn-to-skate classes, hockey initiation programs, birthday parties and other special events that will make them a regular guest of your facility.

Public sessions need to be consistently scheduled and not relinquished for hockey tournaments, competitions, etc. User groups will put pressure on management to secure these prime times for their special events but it is not sound business to disrupt the consistency of these sessions for the general public. Your goal should be for the public to know your hours and not expect them to change on a sporadic basis.

After establishing your public skating hours, the next priority is your “learn-to-skate” classes. Again, this is very important because these skaters will feed into your competitive figure skating, synchronized skating and hockey programs. It is wise to schedule at least two sessions per week, one for a weekday late afternoon time slot and one on Saturday morning. These sessions should be 60-90 minutes long with each student attending a 30-minute class once or twice a week. Five to seven classes can be taught on designated, coned-off strips during each 30-minute session.

Once public skating and learn-to-skate sessions are scheduled, you can divide up your remaining hours as you see fit. Based on existing numbers, one group may require more time than another and those requests must be considered as part of the big picture, along with your need to utilize and schedule your ice surface throughout the year. Typically, figure skating is scheduled during the early afternoons on weekdays and on Saturday mornings. Once a program is fully established, it is not uncommon for figure skaters to use the early morning times before school. Youth hockey programs usually begin between 5:00 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. on weekdays and continue until about 9:00 or 10:00 p.m. Again, once the program builds and requires more ice time, early mornings can be contracted to the youth players.

Adult hockey leagues and broomball leagues are usually scheduled from about 9:00 p.m. until midnight seven days a week. Both of these activities are an excellent source of revenue if operated in house rather than contracting ice to individuals at an hourly rate. A facility can generate \$300 to

\$400 per hour by running these programs in house.

Scheduling for Olympic Fever

Remember – Effective Scheduling and Programming Is the Cornerstone of our Business!

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