

## Hockey Time!



Jake played hockey. It was his favorite sport. Sure, the other ones were fun, but there was something very fun about ice hockey. It was a full-contact sport, but so were other sports. It was fast, and some sports were fast, but this was a sort of breakneck, crash the boards, shoot the puck sort of crazy. Maybe that's what he liked best about it: the crashing and the skating. It was a skate until you can't hardly breathe and get that puck in the net kind of excitement that was one of a kind.

Hockey is a little expensive to start playing. You can play roller hockey on rollerblades with just a stick, some elbow and knee pads, and a mask. That was pretty cheap. Field hockey was played in grass. You only need shoes, a stick, a ball, and maybe a mask for safety. Ice hockey was another thing altogether. You had full body pads, especially on the hips and shoulders. Knee and elbow pads helped, because hitting the ice hurt. You also needed a helmet with a mask, because the puck could break teeth or bones if it hit. It was important to have good ice skates, padded gloves to protect your hands, too. You probably want shin pads and a mouth guard also. Anywhere that could get hit should be covered up. So, you can see why it is a bit expensive with all of this equipment. You should see all the special equipment a goalkeeper needs, too!

Hockey usually has 6 players per team, including a goalkeeper. Players are usually broken up into three groups: goalkeepers, defense and forwards. There are different kinds of defense, midfielders, and forwards, each with a slightly different job, but each team only has one goalkeeper. Hockey is a lot like soccer, in that the goalkeeper has special rights to hold and use the puck. Unlike soccer, players *can* use their hands or feet or other body parts to catch and stop the puck. However, passes and shots must be made with the stick. Hand passes or kick passes are not allowed.

Hockey is interesting because it doesn't have halves or quarters. Instead it has 3 periods of 20 minutes each. There is an intermission, usually 10-15 minutes between these periods. Hockey also has a lot of substitutions, as often as every couple minutes. You don't see these kind of changes in any other sport, except maybe football, where whole teams change with the possession of the ball. Because there is such a quick change of players, teams try to keep fresh, energized players on the ice at all times. This means you skate your heart out, up and down the rink until your shift is over. It is like running a sprint, taking a few minutes off, and doing it again repeatedly.

Jake liked playing goalkeeper. He felt like a gladiator on the ice. He had an oversized helmet to protect his neck from incoming shots. He had a net glove on one hand, and an oversized stick on the other, which had a blocking glove on the back. He also had very large shin and leg guards to help block the net. Positioned right, he could fully block around half the goal with his body, his pads and his stick.

Hockey is a game of mere inches, though, and strong forwards could slide the puck into the smallest holes in his defense. Some could lift it over his shoulder and catch the corner of the net. Sometimes he missed a block right between his skates! The goalkeeper was arguably the hardest position to play, but also the most important. The goalkeeper prevented scores for the other team, directed defense, and helped control the pace of the game.

Hockey is a lightning-fast sport. Pucks fly at up to 100 miles per hour! Can you imagine snapping a puck at that speed or having to catch that with a glove? It is smaller than the balls in most sports, remember, and it comes out of nowhere in a hurry. Like soccer or basketball, passing is huge. There are also fast breaks down the rink.

Referees watch for tripping, offsides penalties, slashing, tripping, and other rules infractions, but mostly they like to keep the game moving along smoothly. Most minor infractions, like offsides or hitting the puck out of bounds usually just end with the blow of a whistle and teams have a face-off. This is where one player from each time has to try to take the puck when it is dropped. This is somewhat like a jump ball in basketball. Get the puck, get it to your team, and try to make shots on goal.

Penalties happen a few times per period. In cases of penalties, one team loses a player for a few minutes. This gives the other team a 1 or sometimes even 2-man advantage for up to a few minutes. The shorthanded team must go on defense, while the other team takes their time setting up good passes for shots on goal. Lots of goals are made during these power play chances, and the typical hockey game might end at 4-2 or 1-0. It is a bit higher scoring than soccer.

Jake knew not everyone loved his sport as much as he did. What wasn't to like, though? On hot summer days, a cool ice rink was fun to visit. Fans of basketball and soccer could see some of the same game play ideas, too. The contact was much like football or rugby, too. It was a rough, fun, and fast game to watch! Hockey is the biggest sport in Canada and several northern European countries. Hockey is also an Olympic sport, and there are several international competitions as well.

Are you going to try to watch or play hockey?



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Use the information in the story to answer the questions below.

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  - A. Roller Hockey
  - B. Ice Hockey
  - C. Field Hockey
  - D. Football
  
2. How many minutes is a hockey game?
  - A. 60
  - B. 45
  - C. 90
  - D. 120
  
3. What sport is never compared to hockey in this story?
  - A. Soccer
  - B. Baseball
  - C. Basketball
  - D. Football
  
4. TRUE OR FALSE: Ice Hockey is the most popular sport to watch in most countries of the world.
  - A. True
  - B. False
  
5. TRUE OR FALSE: Hockey players wear a lot of padding and equipment.
  - A. True
  - B. False

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