

Under-age Athlete Policy

Purpose

The City of Ottawa Ringette Association (CORA) believes that athletes develop best when they play within their age-appropriate division. This policy is an exception to CORA's core philosophy. The decision to permit an under-age athlete to play up will be made only in extraordinary circumstances, and only when it is in the best interest of the individual player, both teams involved, and the association as a whole.

This policy outlines the limited circumstances and formal procedure under which an athlete may be permitted to play in an older age group. (commonly referred to as "playing up").

Applicability

This policy applies to all CORA athletes, FUN3 and above, wishing to play in a division one level higher than their age-appropriate division given that:

- They are a CORA member in good standing.
- They are not an Out-of-Association (OOA) player. OOA under-age athletes are not eligible to try out in higher age divisions in CORA.

Definitions

- Under-age Athlete: An athlete who is eligible to play in a younger age division but wishes to play in an older one. *For example, a U12-eligible athlete trying out for a U14 team.*
- Exceptional Athlete: A player who, at tryouts, is assessed as being in the top tier of their current level of play.
- Out-of-Association (OOA) Player: An athlete who does not reside within CORA's geographic boundaries and requires a release from another association to play with CORA.

Policy Principles

CORA's primary principle is that athletes should play in their age-appropriate division to foster optimal skill and social development, in line with Ringette Canada's [Long Term Athlete Development \(LTAD\) principles](#).

Exceptions to this policy are rare and will only be considered in specific circumstances where they are beneficial to the overall program (e.g., to meet team-forming needs) or for an exceptional athlete who demonstrates the necessary physical, psychological, and social maturity to compete safely at a higher level. All decisions are made on a case-by-case basis.

Procedure for Under-age Tryouts

1. **Written Request & Recommendation:** The athlete's parent or guardian must provide a written notification to the CORA President. This notification must include the rationale for the request to play up and a recommendation from their previous season's head coach and/or the convenor of their age division. This must be submitted no later than 10 days prior to the first tryout session for the older division.
 - a. **Conflict of Interest:** If the previous season's head coach is a parent of the under-age player, a recommendation from another member of the bench staff (e.g., Assistant Coach or another team's coach) or the age-appropriate division's convenor is required to ensure impartiality.
2. **Parental Acknowledgement:** As part of the written notification, parents must acknowledge and accept the potential risks and challenges associated with playing up. These may include, but are not limited to:
 - Increased physical demands and risk of injury in a more competitive and physically mature environment.
 - Social and emotional challenges due to being the youngest player on the team.
 - The possibility of reduced ice time compared to their age-defined team.
 - The understanding that this permission is for one season only and must be re-evaluated annually.
3. **Tryout Attendance:** The athlete must attend tryouts for both their age-appropriate team and the older division. This requirement may be waived at the discretion of the responsible Vice President. All applicable tryout fees must be paid for each session.
4. **No Exceptions for Absences:** CORA's "Tryout Policy for Injured, Ill or Absent Players" does not apply to under-age athletes. Under-age athletes must attend all tryout sessions to be considered for a team at the higher age-division. Failure to attend may result in the loss of their tryout opportunity.

If an athlete is approved they may register and try out for an older age division team

Evaluation of Under-age Athletes

A working group will be formed in advance of tryouts to evaluate under-age athletes. The working group will include the relevant Vice President(s) and both divisional convenors.

- **Assessment Criteria:** In addition to tryout results, the working group will consider a range of factors on a case-by-case basis, including:
 - LTAD principles, such as the athlete's maturity, physical strength, emotional health, and social development.
 - The number of players with similar skills in the older age group.
 - The impact on both the older age group team and the athlete's age-appropriate team.
 - The level of play available in other associations for both age groups.
 - The overall impact on the City of Ottawa Ringette Association.
 - Any other factors deemed relevant by the working group.
- **Skater Requirements:** To be offered a position on an older team, an under-age skater must be assessed:
 - For players trying out for U12: an under-age player must be assessed within the top 50% of the players placed on a U12A team.
 - For all other divisions: an under-age player must be assessed as one of the top 4 players trying out for that age group.
- **Goalie Requirements:** To be offered a position, an under-age goalie must be assessed as the #1 goalie and be considered significantly better than the #2 goalie by the assessors.
 - Note: An under-age goalie may be added as a second goalie to a team if no other goalies are trying out and the working group deems them as being of calibre.
- **Outcome:** If the athlete does not meet the specified criteria, they will be placed back into their age-appropriate division.

Exceptions

- The CORA board of directors reserves the right to make exceptions to this policy for the overall good of the program.

Compliance

This policy must be followed in conjunction with all relevant policies from the Ringette Ontario and the Eastern Region Ringette Association.

Ringette Ontario Age Divisions (for CORA Policy purposes)

- U12: Athletes turning 10 or 11 by December 31 of the playing year.
- U14: Athletes turning 12 or 13 by December 31 of the playing year.
- U16: Athletes turning 14 or 15 by December 31 of the playing year.
- U19: Athletes turning 16, 17, or 18 by December 31 of the playing year.