

## What Is the Utica Jr. Comets Mite Program?

### 1. Age Classification & Philosophy

- In youth hockey under USA Hockey, "Mite" refers to players 8 years old and under, commonly abbreviated as 8U. This is the introductory youth level, preceding Squirt (10U), Pee wee (12U), Bantam (14U) and Midget (16U/18U).
- There are often three designations of mites (Blue/White/Red) used by local youth hockey associations to associate a skill or age-specific subgroup. For example, within UJRC, a blue mite (6U), would indicate an entry level mite team that introduces first time mite players to skill-based practice while teaching gameplay scenarios through weekend competition. White mites (8U) are typically second to third year mites that expand their skating and shooting skills during the week while advancing gameplay concepts during competitive contests. Red mites (8U) are third to final year mites that will develop skills and techniques to get ready for full-ice competition the following year in Squirts (10U). This is considered a competitive group that will be pushed to be their best on and off the ice.
- Based on the individual child's development, there is the potential for movement within teams during the mite season based on a parent/coach/organization agreement.

### 2. American Development Model (ADM) & Cross-Ice Emphasis

- USA Hockey's **American Development Model (ADM)** is at the heart of the Mite program. It emphasizes developmentally appropriate ice formats (cross-ice and half-ice games), small-area skill development, and high engagement for young players.
- The cross-ice or half-ice format—used extensively in Mite hockey—is promoted under programs like "Red, White & Blue Hockey", which highlights critical benefits like more puck touches, faster decision-making, cost-effective ice usage, and a fun learning environment.

### 3. Structured, Fun, and Age-Appropriate Practices

- Mite practices focus on foundational skating skills—Agility, Balance, Coordination (ABC's)—and embed those within playful, gamified drills that maintain high engagement and repetition (e.g., relay races, tag games, 2v2 matches).
- As players progress, they transition from cross-ice formats toward half-ice and, eventually, full-ice play as their skills, awareness, and endurance develop.

## 4. Schedule

- The mite program typically runs from September through March, includes two practices and weekend games weekly, intrasquad 4v4 sessions, and up to 35 half-ice games against local teams. There is the also an opportunity to be evaluated for a AAA 8U team that plays full-ice games and holds additional practice sessions for more advanced players.

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### Summary Snapshot

Feature	Description
Age Group	6U-8U Mite
Development Philosophy	Based on USA Hockey's ADM — focus on skill, fun, and long-term retention
Game Format	Cross-ice → Half-ice → Full-ice as skills progress
Practice Design	ABCs, station-based drills, games disguised as fun to maintain engagement.
Local Implementation	Many associations offer tiered levels (e.g., Red, White, Blue) based on skills

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### Why It Works

- **Maximized Engagement:** Smaller ice surfaces let each child have more puck touches and involvement—critical at young ages.
- **Faster Learning:** Frequent repetition in game-like situations speeds up skill acquisition compared to traditional full-ice drills.
- **Accessible & Inclusive:** ADM allows kids of varying ages and abilities to participate meaningfully—with local associations tailoring offerings to beginners through advanced players via tiers like Red, White and Blue.