

## **2008-10 Strategic Plan**

East High Hockey was one of six founding members of Utah High School Hockey in 1975 and was the first state champion. East won another three state championships over the years, including the 2007 State High School Summer League Championship. East Hockey has long been one of Utah's dominant hockey programs and is considered one of the contenders for the state championship every year. This tradition of winning is a source of pride for the program, it helps the program attract players, and it is a legacy everyone associated with the program would like to preserve.

This strategic plan was developed with input from coaches and parents as a guide for building on the East winning tradition and establishing the programs necessary to ensure the East Hockey legacy continues. In order to be successful in the future, East Hockey needs to have development programs that ensure players in youth hockey leagues will want to attend East High and play East Hockey. The club also needs to focus on building a financial foundation that provides our coaches with the margin of excellence funding that will ensure every kid has a great experience playing East Hockey.

### **Mission and Vision: A Winning Tradition**

At their best, high school athletics provide life lessons in team work, personal discipline and personal responsibility that prepare players for adult life. High school teams, including East Hockey, are a mix of adolescents and emerging adults, and in this mix are opportunities for leadership by upper classmen and for younger players to associate with peers who are committed to a healthy lifestyle and are individually disciplined in the pursuit of team goals. High school athletics are also a privilege that encourages the players to make a commitment to academics and are an association with kids developing the discipline necessary to do well academically while competing on a sports team (and this is part of the growth experience for every player).

East Hockey is committed to providing a positive "defining experience" for every player associated with the program. The team encourages players to have many interests, but at the same time players are expected to make a commitment to excellence that requires they invest a great deal of time, energy and effort to their personal and team success. This

commitment requires a level of discipline and personal responsibility that challenges every player to develop the adult skills necessary to succeed in all endeavors.

East Hockey is about winning, and this commitment to winning is a major part of what defines the team. Not winning at all cost, but developing the individual players, hockey knowledge, and team work that ensure the team's success year after year. Living up to this commitment is not about having fun, although the players all think it is fun to be part of East Hockey. East Hockey is about the personal satisfaction and growth that comes with having an ambitious goal and working hard to achieve it. It is not championships that define East's "winning tradition." It is the commitment by the players to strive to be the best that defines East Hockey. Winning games takes care of itself.

### **Strategic Goals, 2008-10**

East High Hockey's ongoing success depends on the team's success in meeting four strategic goals:

1. *Player development.* East needs to "grow its own" players to stay viable as a high school affiliated program (versus an independent program). East has motivated athletes who become interested in hockey once they are in high school, and there has not been a mechanism for bringing them into hockey by providing basic skating skills and developing them over the course of their high school years. In addition, a commitment to player development is critical if East is going to attract younger players with prior experience playing recreation hockey in youth leagues. A fourteen-year-old who steps onto the ice with seasoned eighteen-year-olds has every reason to be intimidated, so it is important that the team provide player development opportunities that allow these players to progress through a junior varsity program with a goal of joining the varsity squad at a point they have the confidence, skills, and size to compete with adults.
2. *Hockey team skills.* East has had the luxury of attracting some of the premier hockey talent in the state, talent that has gone on to play at elite collegiate and junior levels. However, East has under performed its talent as a team in recent years. Outstanding teams make the most of their talent with systems that produce a pattern of success that builds confidence in the players and also gives the players mental models of what they need to do to be successful. This requires a team identity and practice to ensure the players understand what to do in game situations. Too many travel players means too many competing systems. East needs to have an East system, players who understand it, and players trained to execute it.
3. *Strong team identity.* Great teams inspire commitment and sacrifice. Players show up to practice and work hard not because the coach expects them to do so, but because they are committed to the team and fellow players. East has lost many team traditions that encouraged strong team identity, and it is important for the team's ongoing success that we rebuild traditions and commitment. This strong

team identity is also part of creating a positive high school experience that attracts new players and supports player retention.

4. *Success attracting new players.* The lifeblood of any school-based athletic team is attracting talented athletes every year to replace graduating players. The 2008-09 East team graduated seven seniors, nearly half the team. It is absolutely critical that the team attract new players this season and reach out to the county league to encourage bantams to include East in their future hockey plans. There will be no 2010-2011 East Hockey team if we do not have success attracting new players.

## **2009-10 Season Plans**

The relationship between the proposed plans and the strategic goals is diagrammed in Figure 1. All the proposals address more than one strategic goal. One of the strengths of the plan is various programs are self-reinforcing and leverage one another. Figure 1 also highlights the programmatic efforts that are highly dependent on our ability to generate booster support for East Hockey. The planned initiatives are:

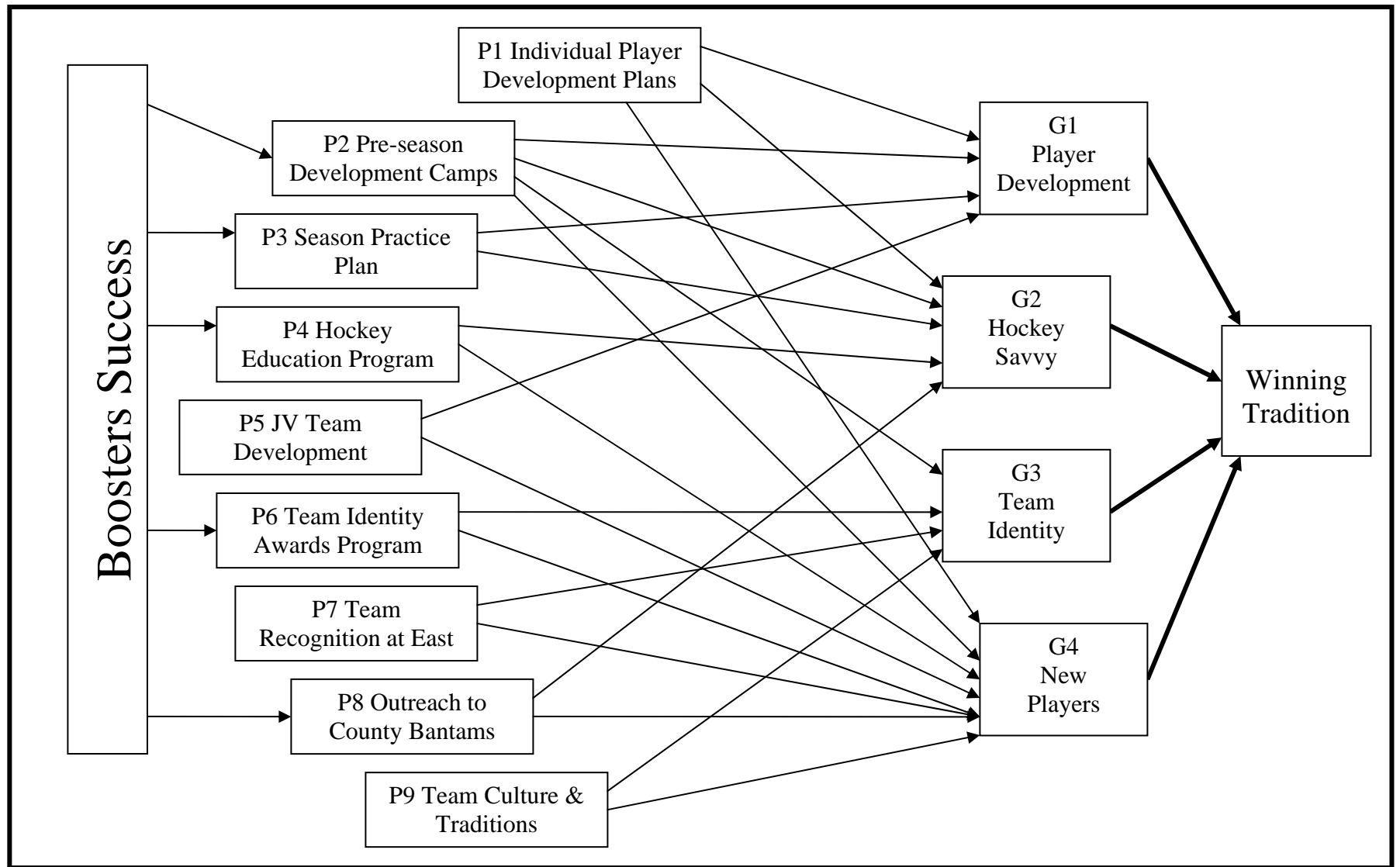
1. The coaches will create individual development plans for each player. The development plan includes an assessment of individual skating skills and team concepts, a goal-setting opportunity that allows each player to choose where they plan for focus for 6-8 week blocks during the season, and an opportunity to discuss individual development goals with the coaches. This development plan will be reviewed and updated four times during the season and the players will grade their progress on the goals they establish. The coaches will provide guidelines for self-directed skill development, plans that may include drop-in hockey skating, individual exercises that help develop puck handling skills, for instance, and specific practice objectives. This program will:
  - a. Give individual players specific goals and responsibility for meeting their goals with ongoing feedback and assessment. This should improve every player's game whether beginner or travel player.
  - b. Create player awareness of how their skills relate to the team concepts necessary to play varsity hockey.
  - c. This commitment to player development will help the team attract new players.
2. The coaches will run a pre-season camp in August and September before the season starts. The focus will be on skill development and exposing all players to the East system. The benefits are:
  - a. Accelerated skill development for individual players.
  - b. An intensive introduction to the East offensive and defensive schemes, including chalk talks.
  - c. The pre-season will include dry land conditioning with an emphasis on each player developing a commitment to enhancing his fitness and endurance as the season progresses.

- d. This camp structure is also highly conducive to team building and team activities that prepare the club for the coming season. Additional focus will be given to the team “clubhouse attitude” and developing a supportive team culture.
    - e. The existence of this camp will be a major selling point for individuals who have limited hockey experience or who are making the transition from recreational youth hockey to high school hockey.
  3. Team practice is necessary to develop team play, and the coaches are developing a plan for a mix of practices and focused skill development sessions throughout the season. Practices will focus on running the team system and team play, and the skill development sessions will focus more on individual hockey skills, including advanced skills. The benefits are:
    - a. Accelerated individual development and more uniform advanced skills across players.
    - b. Greater development of the team concept and understanding of game situations. Teams need to practice to execute at an advanced level, and we are fortunate the coaches are available afternoons and are willing to commit to practices in addition to games.
  4. The coaches will be implementing a hockey education program based on videotaped game analysis, situational analyses, and “chalk talks” focused on competitor analysis and advanced hockey theory. It is expected, that, as in other cases:
    - a. This will further develop individual player’s hockey savvy and help them understand how the execution goals they are learning relate to team success.
    - b. This program enhancement is another aspect of the personal development focus that distinguishes East hockey from other high school programs.
    - c. These are also team development opportunities.
  5. Fielding a Junior Varsity team is critical for bringing new players to hockey and for transitioning younger kids from county recreation programs to the intense competition of Utah High School Hockey. We need to commit to this program if we hope to encourage new players to join the team and to provide development opportunities for players transitioning from youth hockey. The Junior Varsity games are an opportunity for kids with developing skills to get a lot of game time against other developing players. Players who are on travel teams are ineligible to play JV. The JV team will be funded out of team fees since the JV players will practice with the full team. This important development program will:
    - a. Help develop new players. It is critical to meeting the “grow our own” goal and helps sustain a pipeline of seasoned players who are given the chance to mature before they enter a varsity game.
    - b. The existence of the JV program is clearly critical if East is going to attract county players and their parents. It is not uncommon for parents and kids to

be frightened when they see the large men on the ice at a high school game, especially when they look at their 110 pound 8<sup>th</sup> grader. Knowing their child will have an opportunity to play JV is important reassurance as they consider high school hockey.

- c. Offering a JV program requires a larger coaching staff, but this is also an opportunity to develop new coaches interested in working into a varsity coaching position.
6. East High Hockey has always had a jacket or sweatshirt with the team logo that the kids wear to school and to games. There is an opportunity to expand this and support their pride in being on the team by providing additional logo apparel to the team. In addition, we can support the coaches in recognizing kids for team achievements by providing funding for special recognitions throughout the year. Tangibly recognizing a player who has made exceptional effort to improve his skills in one evaluation period is a great way to highlight contributions and communicate to the rest of the team that the coaches are serious about the development plans. This not only helps reinforce the kids who are making team contributions, but it is also a point of pride they can share with younger players who may later join the team. The current players' pride is one of the greatest stories we can share with potential players and their parents.
7. Team pride will be greatly enhanced if we can improve awareness and recognition at East High. We are looking for opportunities to place team stories in the school newspaper and to get more publicity about games at school. We are hampered somewhat by the team's status as a school club, but there are opportunities as a club that the team is missing. We are actively pursuing improving relations with the school and establishing school-based publicity for the team. In addition to immediate publicity, we are also looking at how the team can have greater exposure in the yearbook, at various school events, and in school publications.
8. We are implementing an outreach program with the Salt Lake County recreation league bantams and already have a liaison with the Lightning bantams, the County select team. We are exploring the possibility East players might get involved with developing youth players in a student coaching program. Players will learn a great deal teaching skills to beginning hockey players, and these players are also outstanding role models for kids coming up in the county hockey system.
9. East's team has many traditions that can be resurrected, including team dinners at the Spaghetti Factory, team socializing, and alumni games during the year. We are also looking to get information on as many East alumni as possible to explore a potential mentor program with alumni who are willing to sponsor events for the team. We are not sure specifically what we want to do here, but we are quite certain that recreating some of the traditions around the team will strengthen team identity and give the current players a sense of the tradition around the program. This includes team stories and legends that only are shared when the team makes it to the finals of the championship tournament, stories and legends only known by players and coaches.

Figure 1. 2008-10 East Hockey Strategic Plan



The relationship between these programs and the team's strategic goals is diagrammed in Figure 1. As stated earlier, the various programs and initiatives that make up the strategic plan are self-reinforcing so that every goal is driven by multiple programs. Individual initiatives are free-standing in several instances. For instance, we can implement the individual development plans without funding beyond what we pay to register the team. Other programs are dependent on funding from the boosters. The expected expenses are:

- Additional practices (16 @ \$160 each for ice = \$2560)
- Skills camps (6 ice sessions @ \$160 = \$960)
- Team identity and awards program (\$100 per kid = \$1800)
- Bantam outreach program (nominal, probably \$200)

In addition to these strategic initiatives, it would be wonderful if the boosters could collectively fund a couple of scholarships for players who have financial hardships. Two \$500 scholarships can make a big difference for a couple of players, and it is something we can all be proud to do.

Our potential for strategic success is clearly greater if the East Hockey Boosters step up and make contributions to the team. We can trim back some of the programs if contributions are not at a level to fully support the team, but we cannot pursue the highest impact programs without significant support from our boosters.

### **Long-term Strategic Initiatives**

Beyond 2010, the team needs to continue to work to establish a strong pipeline of players interested in playing East Hockey, continue to improve its relations with key external constituents, develop greater community visibility, and diversify funding sources for the team. Important future strategic initiatives include:

- Public relations campaign to develop greater awareness of East Hockey and the achievements of our players. This includes the broader community.
- We need to develop programs that stabilize the East Hockey program at a level of 30 players per year, up from the current 17.
- Improving our relationship with Steiner – our “house” – will help the team get greater access to ice and create opportunities for East players, including part-time jobs as instructors and program assistants.
- A scholarship program will greatly enhance the program's ability to attract kids who struggle with the cost of equipment and the registration fees.
- It can only help the team if we can successfully develop an alumni support network that helps with coaching, community relations, and financial support.
- East deserves another UHSH Championship, and it is reasonable to expect that if this plan is successfully implemented, East will be appearing in several championship games in the next five years. We were runner up in 2008 and 2009, and we have the talent to continue to challenge for this honor.

## **Conclusion**

This plan invites comments. Suggestions for changes and additions are welcome. We need to start implementing several key aspects, including pursuing additional ice time, so we hope you can support the plan as outlined and will make a booster contribution. Booster's website:

<http://home.business.utah.edu/mgtjwb/easthockey.html>