

## **U11 A/AA 2026-2027 Season**

### **Head Coach Letter**

I am excited and grateful for the opportunity to serve as Head Coach of the U11 A/AA Carleton Place Cyclones for the 2026-2027 season.

I grew up playing high-level minor hockey and have developed a strong passion for coaching and long-term player development. Over the years, I have coached at multiple levels, from the Fundamentals and Initiation Programs through to competitive minor hockey, working with both boys and girls' teams. Most recently, I served as Head Coach with the CPGHA, leading the U11A team that qualified for Provincials. These experiences have shaped a development-first, athlete-centered coaching philosophy that prioritizes growth, confidence, and enjoyment of the game.

### **Coaching Philosophy**

My coaching philosophy is rooted in player development, confidence-building, and teamwork. I strive to create an environment where players feel supported, challenged, and encouraged to push their limits. Players will be given the freedom to try new skills and make mistakes, as mistakes are a necessary and valuable part of the learning process.

Our primary goal is to help each player continue progressing by narrowing the gap between their strengths and areas for improvement. We will focus on individual skill development, team concepts, and how those skills translate into game situations. By doing so, we aim to put every player in the best possible position to succeed.

I believe strongly in pushing players to work outside of their comfort zones. Growth does not happen without challenge, and I will consistently encourage the girls to stretch themselves, embrace discomfort, and discover what they can achieve. At the same time, I recognize that there are limits to how much young athletes can be pushed. Player development is not linear, and frustration or lack of understanding can sometimes surface during practices or drills. When this happens, it is important to pivot, adjusting the tone, structure, or pace of a session, to ensure players remain confident, engaged, and supported. Striking the right balance between challenge and encouragement is essential to long-term development, enjoyment of the game, and sustained success.

The qualities I value most in our players include:

- A strong work ethic and consistent effort
- Coachability and personal accountability
- Being a supportive and respectful teammate
- A positive attitude and genuine love for the game

Above all else, I want players to enjoy coming to the rink each day and to feel proud of their development throughout the season.

### **Competitive Environment & Player Accountability**

As a Tier 1 (A/AA) program, expectations will be high. Players will be challenged and held accountable to both individual and team standards. Expectations will be clearly communicated at the beginning of the season and applied consistently throughout the year.

At the U11 A/AA level, it can be very physical, and there can be notable differences in player size at this level. Players who are willing to compete, battle, and engage physically will have an advantage. However, the most significant separator at this level is a player's understanding of the game. Players who continue to develop their Hockey IQ will progress at a faster rate. Understanding positional play, finding open ice, protecting the puck, and making effective decisions are foundational elements we will emphasize throughout the season.

We are committed to fostering positive peer relationships within a competitive environment. Players should feel safe, supported, motivated, and empowered, both on and off the ice.

### **Coaching Staff**

The coaching staff will be selected following tryouts. The staff will be intentionally assembled to complement one another, offering different perspectives and teaching styles to keep players engaged and motivated. The concept of "team" applies not only to our players, but to our coaching staff as well. For the upcoming season, I intend to include a non-parent assistant coach on the bench.

### **Commitment & Schedule**

Based on previous seasons, families can expect approximately 4-6 on-ice and off-ice activities per week. If your player is continuing through the tryout process, please ensure you understand and are comfortable with this level of commitment.

- Off-ice activities will focus on building positive growth mindsets through fun, team-oriented sessions.
- Strength and conditioning sessions will take place bi-weekly at Adaptive Performance (280 Didsbury Rd, Unit #102, Kanata).

Our priorities are family, school, and hockey—in that order. That said, during the hockey season, commitment to the team is expected to take precedence over other sports and extracurricular activities. Scheduled blackout dates will be built into the calendar to allow for family time and recovery.

All players and families are expected to demonstrate a positive attitude, strong work ethic, and a high level of compete throughout the season.

## **Tournaments**

The team will aim to participate in approximately 5-6 tournaments, depending on league play and potential qualification for Provincials.

Planned tournament participation includes:

- Two local tournaments
- Three away tournaments, with anticipated locations such as:
  - North Bay
  - Possible US Tournament
  - Belleville
  - Aurora (Silver Stick)

## **Blackout Dates**

- Thanksgiving Weekend: October 9-12, 2026
- Christmas Break: December 23-29, 2026
- March Break: March 15-20, 2027

The coaching staff is very mindful of the physical and mental demands placed on players throughout the season. We recognize that at times players may feel fatigued or overworked, and we will continuously assess the overall energy, workload, and well-being of the team. When appropriate, we will pivot to ensure players are getting the rest they need. This may include recommending optional-only practices or implementing specific focus-based sessions designed to reduce load while maintaining development. Our priority is to support the long-term health, enjoyment, and growth of each player.

## **Team Fees**

Estimated team fees are expected to range between \$1,300 and \$2,200, depending on:

- Tournament selection
- Provincial qualification
- Sponsorships and fundraising outcomes

Cash Calendar and Bottle Drive Fundraising are mandatory participation. Any other Fundraising will have a payout amount to opt out of the fundraising event. A high-level Budget will be available at the tryouts.

## **Tryouts & Player Evaluation**

Player evaluation begins the moment athletes arrive at the rink. I will ask the evaluators and on ice coaches to assess:

- Pre-practice habits and preparation
- Bench behavior
- Sportsmanship before and after sessions

On the ice, we will evaluate Hockey IQ, positional play, compete level, work ethic, and the ability to move the puck effectively through skating and passing. While physical engagement is important at this level, decision-making and understanding of the game will be key factors during the evaluation process.

Goaltenders will be evaluated by skilled and trained goalie coaches throughout the tryout process. Our assessment will focus on both technical ability and overall game readiness. Key evaluation areas will include movement and crease mobility, focus and compete level, rebound control, puck tracking, positioning, and the ability to read and adapt to developing plays. We will also consider communication, recovery habits, and how goaltenders respond to instruction and in-game situations. Our goal is to ensure a thorough, fair, and development-focused evaluation of all goaltenders.

Release feedback will be available upon request, beginning 24 hours after the final tryout session.

## **Closing**

I am very much looking forward to the opportunity to work with your daughter and to help create a challenging, positive, and rewarding hockey experience for the 2026-2027 season.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out at any time.

Sincerely,

Stuart Robinson  
Head Coach, U11 A/AA  
Carleton Place Cyclones