Arguably, however, social development isn’t the same for everyone. This is no more distinct than in the generalized differences between genders. Not that there exists a need for isolation between boys and girls, but it doesn’t hurt to ask ourselves what it might be like to be in the skates of the only girl on an all-boy “co-ed” team. In this case the role of building relationships is different for the female player as it is for the male. With that in mind, if there was a different value placed on a girl’s socialization how far would she go in hockey? After all, if more girls are having fun because they relate more so to a specific group doesn’t that contribute to everyone’s success?

The Edmonton Girls Hockey Association (EGHA) seems to think so. By offering everything from Initiation hockey for three to six-year-olds all the way up to junior for young women 18 to 21 years old, the EGHA brings a viable option to the table for girls and their parents, as well as women seeking an alternative to traditional co-ed teams; an option that still has its sights set on the physical aspects of the game.

“My daughters have learned to love a sport and be good at it,” said Livia Paradis, mother of three girls all registered in the association. “But best of all have made friends that will possibly last a life time. My oldest daughter still has the same friends that she made when she started in pre-novice and the same is true for my other two daughters. The girls are so excited to be going to the practices/games because they get to see their friends.”

Moe Teliani, a hockey player for the past 25 years, and himself a father of three girls, couldn’t agree more. “They’re making new friends, which could develop into lifelong friendships,” he said. “And a hard practice at 6:30 am is quickly forgotten after a team breakfast at McDonalds.”

Obviously, the opportunity to develop friendships isn’t unique to girls-only hockey; however, it seems that the quality of the relationships being developed by some of the girls in the EGHA is certainly quite special.

“In other associations I have seen great team socialization as well, with many team-building functions and socialization opportunities,” said Randy Roszell, a father of two girls, both playing in the EGHA. “However, the biggest difference is in the girls’ willingness to accept one another more readily in these situations as compared to when my own children played on co-ed teams. Although my daughters were accepted as hockey players, the level of socialization was not nearly as incredible as it is with the teams in the EGHA. My children are often invited to additional events (skating parties, birthday parties, movies, etc.) where they were not in the past.”

All three parents currently volunteer with the association and speak highly of the association’s interactive and inclusive nature.

“We became involved in the girls league when my oldest daughter was 5 years old,” said Paradis, the association’s peewee director. “She is now 12, turning 13 in June. Our middle daughter is 9 and has been playing since she was 4 and our youngest is 7 and has played since she was 4 as well. Our girls get very excited about the beginning of each hockey season because they get to see more of their friends and get an opportunity to make new friends. The events are organized for all different times. We have breakfasts after early practices, suppers after late games, sleepovers just about every weekend, team Christmas parties, and swimming events. There’s lots of socialization.”
"The thing that brought me to the association was my daughter, Talia," said Teliani. "I have three daughters and never previously considered registering any of them in the game I love. Then one day, Talia asked me if she could play hockey, and I said, 'Why not?' I researched girls' hockey online and found the EGHA. I thought it sounded great."

After serving two years as an assistant coach in Novice and one year in Initiation, Teliani is currently the head coach of the Atom "A"

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Dynamite. Having been around the game for many years as a player, he lent his experience to the association by running a conditioning camp for the Atom, PeeWee, Bantam, and Midget girls this year prior to the start of the season. He also ran a mini-hockey camp during the summer for some of the girls he'd previously coached.

"The girls value both the physical fitness and the socialization, but I'd have to say they value the social aspect more," he says. "The out of town tournaments are a huge team builder and the girls talk about them year over year. Swimming and other off-ice team events are always a huge hit. I know that my daughter invites her hockey teammates to her birthday parties before any of her school friends. I'm probably the coach that pushes the social side of things more than any other coach in the EGHA. It really helps as they are having a lot of fun while getting physically fit and learning life skills as well as hockey skills."

Now in his second season with the EGHA, Randy Roszell is currently coaching the seven to eight year old novice girls. He's also been actively involved in the co-ed league.

"I have been involved in minor hockey for six years, coaching my two daughters throughout that time," he said. "And there are two significant advantages that girls' teams seem to have demonstrated relative to boys' teams. Primarily, the socialization and camaraderie in the dressing room indicates a higher degree of acceptance amongst the players, and secondly, the coachability of the girls is phenomenal, and the team concept is very easy to develop."

In truth, it's a bit of a misnomer to say that the EGHA is girls only hockey. In fact, up until PeeWee when body checking comes into play, girls' teams play co-ed teams.

"The girls in Novice and in Atom play against other teams that are at the same skill level, regardless of the gender of the player," said Roszell. "Once a player is PeeWee age, they play only against other girls teams if they are playing on an EGHA team. By this time, girls have developed a great sense of the sport, with a significant focus on team play. The hockey is exceptionally fast and exciting."

And it doesn't end there. Thanks to the hard work of members from throughout the association the EGHA has seen considerable growth in recent years, and with the development of the Midget AAA league and the inception of this year's Junior "A" hockey league, girls' hockey is only going to get faster and more exciting as it transitions into the future of women's hockey.

It goes without saying that socialization isn't the most important factor when it comes to hockey, but when all of the other bases like physical fitness and proper coaching are covered it's good to know that someone is working to also provide a viable social network to help all female hockey players develop and foster a long lasting love of our game.

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