

# THE LACONIA BLUEPRINT

## Building a Sustainable Junior Hockey Organization

By Andrew Trimble



A seven-part operating framework for junior hockey leaders, built from lessons learned in Laconia, New Hampshire.

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## Core Blueprint Pillars

<b>Stability</b>	<b>Market</b>	<b>Development</b>	<b>Recruiting</b>
<b>Housing</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Scorecard</b>	<b>Sustainability</b>

# Introduction

The Laconia Blueprint: Building a Sustainable Junior Hockey Organization

Over the years, I've had the opportunity to visit, work with, and observe junior hockey organizations across the United States and Canada. Some thrive for decades. Others disappear after only a few seasons.

## *Why?*

That's the question that inspired this series.

Starting tomorrow, I'll be publishing a seven-part series called The Laconia Blueprint: Building a Sustainable Junior Hockey Organization.

This isn't a theory series.

It's not based on a business book.

It's not based on a seminar.

It's based on lessons learned while helping operate a junior hockey organization in Laconia, New Hampshire for over a decade.

One of the realities of junior hockey is that success is often viewed through a very narrow lens. Wins. Losses. Championships. Advancement numbers.

Those things matter.

But long-term sustainability requires much more.

It requires stable leadership.

It requires trust.

It requires community support.

It requires systems.

It requires culture.

Most importantly, it requires patience.

Many organizations spend enormous amounts of energy trying to find shortcuts. The next recruiting trick. The next marketing gimmick. The next roster move that will solve every problem.

In my experience, the organizations that last are usually doing something much less exciting.

They're building.

Slowly.

Consistently.

Purposefully.

The goal of this series is to share some of the lessons we've learned along the way.

Over the next seven articles, we'll explore topics that every junior hockey operator should be thinking about.

## **Part 1**

Stability Wins

Why most junior hockey organizations never reach Year 10.

## **Part 2**

Understanding Your Market

Finding out what works in your location and geographic area.

## **Part 3**

The Den of Development

Creating a player development system that produces consistent results.

## **Part 4**

Recruiting Without Selling

How honesty, relationships, and reputation attract the right players.

## **Part 5**

Housing: Do It Right to Win in the Long Run

Why housing may be the most overlooked competitive advantage in junior hockey.

## **Part 6**

Building Community Support Beyond the Rink

Creating impact that extends far beyond hockey.

## **Part 7**

The Junior Hockey Operator Scorecard

A practical self-assessment for owners, operators, and leadership groups.

The purpose of this series isn't to suggest there is only one way to build a successful organization.

Every market is different.

Every ownership group is different.

Every community presents unique challenges.

What works in Laconia may not work somewhere else.

But I believe every operator can learn from the experiences of others, and I hope these articles create valuable conversations throughout junior hockey.

At the end of the day, players deserve stable organizations.

Families deserve trustworthy organizations.

Communities deserve organizations that contribute beyond the rink.

And operators deserve resources that help them build something that lasts.

I look forward to sharing the journey.

Tomorrow we begin with Part 1:

Stability Wins: Why Most Junior Hockey Organizations Never Reach Year 10.

## **Free Junior Hockey Operator Consultation**

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If you'd like to discuss organizational structure, recruiting systems, housing, player development, communication, culture, or long-term sustainability, I'd be happy to connect.

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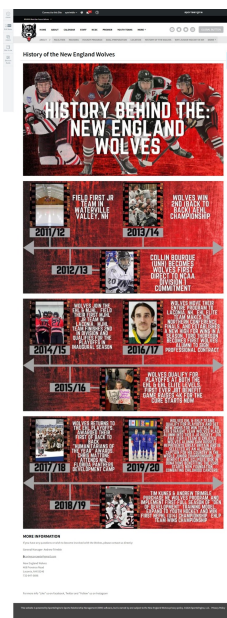
## **About Andrew Trimble**

Andrew Trimble is the co-owner of the New England Wolves Hockey Club, founder of Scoring Concepts, creator of AI Hockey Advisor, author, and hockey development coach.

Over the past decade, he has worked with thousands of players, families, coaches, and organizations while helping build one of New England's most stable junior hockey programs.

His work focuses on player development, leadership, organizational systems, and helping hockey organizations create sustainable long-term success both on and off the ice.

# Part 1: Stability Wins



## Stability Wins: A Data-Driven Look at Why Some Junior Hockey Organizations Last

When people talk about successful junior hockey organizations, they often focus on recruiting, coaching, facilities, or player advancement.

Those things matter.

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But after nearly a decade helping operate the New England Wolves in Laconia, I've come to believe that the single most important factor in long-term success is something much less glamorous:

***Stability.***

To understand why, it's worth looking at the history of junior hockey in Laconia.

Before the Wolves arrived, the city was home to the Laconia Leafs. From 2005 through 2013, the Leafs struggled to establish consistent success on the ice.

Over eight seasons, the Leafs posted records of:

6 wins

5 wins

5 wins

5 wins

5 wins

10 wins

3 wins

10 wins

During that eight-year span, the organization never posted a winning season and never won more than 10 games in a year.

The numbers tell a story, but they don't tell the entire story.

Like many struggling junior hockey organizations, the challenges weren't simply about wins and losses. Organizations facing long-term struggles often experience instability in leadership, staffing, recruiting, housing, operations, and overall direction.

When our staff arrived in Laconia, we knew we weren't simply taking over a hockey team.

We were trying to build a sustainable organization.

That required a completely different approach.

Instead of asking, "How do we win next season?"

We started asking, "How do we build something that is still here ten years from now?"

That mindset influenced every decision we made.

One of the biggest differences between the Wolves and many junior hockey organizations has been consistency.

For more than a decade, key members of our leadership and operational group have remained in place.

Tim Kunes.

Mike Potenza.

John McKenzie.

Along with countless billet families, volunteers, rink staff members, community partners, and supporters who have continued to invest in the program year after year.

The consistency extended beyond personnel.

Our schedule remained consistent.

Our development model remained consistent.

Our housing expectations remained consistent.

Our relationships with the rink remained consistent.

Our organizational mission remained consistent.

The systems improved, but the foundation never changed.

The results followed.

During our final full season operating both EHL and EHLA teams, the Wolves recorded a combined 72 wins, the highest combined total of any organization in the league that season.

Think about that for a moment.

The same city that once struggled to produce double-digit wins in a season became home to one of the league's most successful organizations.

That transformation didn't happen because of one great recruiting class.

It didn't happen because of one great coach.

It didn't happen because of one great season.

It happened because of years of stability and the key factors that will be written about in this series for the next 6 days.

Years of relationship building.

Years of operational consistency.

Years of developing trust within the community.

Years of creating systems that players, families, and staff members could rely upon.

One of the biggest mistakes I see in junior hockey today is organizations chasing short-term solutions.

New staff every year.

New philosophies every year.

New expectations every year.

New systems every year.

The result is often confusion.

Players don't know what they're joining.

Families don't know what to expect.

Staff members don't know the long-term vision.

The organizations that survive and thrive are usually the ones that commit to something bigger than a season.

They build systems.

They build trust.

They build culture.

Most importantly, they build stability.

The data from Laconia tells a powerful story.

One organization struggled to gain traction over nearly a decade.

Another organization committed to stability, consistency, and long-term thinking and became one of the most successful programs in its league.

That's not an accident.

That's what happens when an organization stops thinking season-to-season and starts thinking decade-to-decade.

Because in junior hockey, stability isn't just an operational advantage.

It's a competitive advantage.

And in many cases, it's the difference between organizations that survive and organizations that disappear.

## **Key Takeaways for Operators**

- Stability creates trust.
- Consistent leadership creates stronger culture.
- Housing stability matters.
- Strong operational systems compound over time.
- Community relationships are built over years, not months.
- Sustainable organizations think in decades, not seasons.

## **Free Junior Hockey Operator Consultation**

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For nearly a decade, he has helped lead one of New England's most stable and successful junior hockey organizations while working with thousands of players, families, coaches, and throughout North America.

## Part 2: Understanding Your Market

The Laconia Blueprint Part 2

Understanding Your Market: Before You Build a Team, Understand the Pond

In junior hockey, everyone wants to talk about coaches, recruiting, player development, and facilities.

Those things matter.

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But before any of those conversations happen, there is a more important question every operator should ask:

Can this market support a hockey team?

I've watched organizations spend hundreds of thousands of dollars launching teams only to discover they never truly understood the market they were entering.

They found a rink.

They ordered jerseys.

They hired coaches.

Then they started asking questions they should have asked first.

Where are the players coming from?

Who will house them?

Who will sponsor the team?

Who will attend the games?

Who will promote the organization?

The reality is simple:

Recruiting is the lifeblood of every junior hockey organization.

Without players, nothing else matters.

That's why the first thing I tell anyone considering launching a program is to understand where your players will come from.

Some markets have a strong local player base.

Others don't.

Some communities can consistently produce enough players to support a junior organization.

Others require you to recruit from outside your geographic area.

There is nothing wrong with either approach.

But you need to know which one you're dealing with.

At the Wolves, we've always understood that we needed to do both.

We recruit local players when appropriate.

But we also understand that we must continually recruit beyond our backyard.

I often call this:

"Fishing in Other Ponds."

If your local pond isn't large enough, you need to identify other ponds.

Other states.

Other provinces.

Other countries.

Other leagues.

Other relationships.

The mistake many operators make is assuming players will simply show up.

They won't.

You need a recruiting plan long before you need a roster.

Once you've identified where your players will come from, the next step is evaluating the rest of the market.

## **Know Your Rink Situation**

This may sound obvious, but it surprises me how many organizations enter markets without securing long-term facility commitments.

You need to know:

Who owns the rink?

Are they supportive of junior hockey?

Will they commit ice time long-term?

Can your players train consistently?

Is there room for growth?

Facilities can make or break an organization.

Strong relationships with rink ownership create stability.

Weak relationships create uncertainty.

## **Build Housing Before You Need Housing**

Housing is often treated as an afterthought.

That's a mistake.

If players are your product, housing is part of the player experience.

You need billet families.

You need community support.

You need people who believe in what you're building.

The best time to recruit housing isn't August.

It's twelve months before August.

## **Find Sponsors Early**

Many organizations view sponsors as financial support.

I view sponsors as community partners.

Sponsors introduce you to new people.

They create credibility.

They help spread your message.

Most importantly, they become invested in your success.

Strong organizations build sponsor relationships before they need sponsor dollars.

## **Develop Media Relationships**

One of the most overlooked parts of building a hockey organization is publicity.

You need people talking about your team.

You need stories being shared.

You need visibility.

That means building relationships with:

Local newspapers

Radio stations

Community publications

Social media influencers

Community leaders

If nobody knows you exist, they can't support you.

Community engagement starts with visibility.

## **Culture Creates Retention**

Many operators think recruiting is about attracting players.

The truth is that recruiting is only half the battle.

Retention matters just as much.

Players stay where they feel valued.

Families stay where communication is strong.

Billet families stay where they feel appreciated.

Sponsors stay where they see impact.

Culture drives retention.

And retention drives stability.

## **The Laconia Lesson**

One of the reasons the Wolves have been able to remain in Laconia for more than a decade is because we invested in the market.

We built relationships.

We worked with the rink.

We developed housing.

We partnered with businesses.

We connected with community leaders.

We created systems.

The result wasn't immediate.

It took years.

But over time, those relationships became one of the strongest competitive advantages our organization has.

Because before you build a hockey team, you need to understand the pond you're fishing in.

And if that pond isn't big enough, you'd better know where the other ponds are.

## **Key Takeaways for Operators**

- Recruiting is the #1 priority.
- Understand your local player pool.
- Be prepared to “Fish in Other Ponds.”
- Secure rink relationships early.
- Build housing before you need it.
- Develop sponsor partnerships.
- Create media relationships.
- Culture drives retention.
- Strong organizations are built within strong communities.

## **Free Junior Hockey Operator Consultation**

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If you'd like to discuss recruiting strategy, market evaluation, housing systems, sponsorship development, organizational growth, or long-term sustainability, I'd be happy to connect.

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## Part 3: The Den of Development



The Laconia Blueprint Part 3

The Den of Development: Building a Player Development System

One of the biggest mistakes I see in junior hockey is organizations believing player development happens automatically.

A team hires a coach.

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Players show up.

Games get played.

And somehow development is expected to occur.

The reality is very different.

Development doesn't happen by accident.

Development is a system.

That belief became one of the guiding principles behind what eventually became the New England Wolves Den of Development.

In the Fall of 2017, Head Coach Tim Kunes and I created the Den of Development model with a simple objective:

Create a structured environment where player development becomes part of everyday life.

Not just during practice.

Not just during games.

Every day.

Because if development is truly your mission, then every part of the day should support that mission.

## **Building the Den of Development**

When we began evaluating junior hockey programs, we noticed many organizations operated on a fairly simple schedule.

Players would attend practice.

Play games.

Work out occasionally.

Then go home.

We believed there was an opportunity to create something more comprehensive.

The result was a development model built around several core components:

Daily Skill Sessions in addition to team practices

## **Position-Specific Training for forwards, defensemen, and goaltenders**

Specialized Off-Ice Workouts

Multiple Video Sessions each week

Peak Performance Counseling

Academic Support and Classroom Time

Individual Development Planning

The goal was to create an environment where players could consistently improve in every area that contributes to long-term success.

## **Every Day Has a Purpose**

One of the philosophies behind the Den of Development is that development should not be limited to a one-hour practice.

Every day should have structure.

Every day should have purpose.

As I often tell families:

“Every day is a full day with our athletes. It is a job. Kids punch their clock in the morning and are either on the ice, in the video room, or doing a workout over the course of the entire day.”

That approach creates consistency.

Instead of asking:

“What are we doing today?”

We ask:

“What are we developing today?”

Those are two very different questions.

## **Position-Specific Development**

One of the challenges in hockey development is that every position requires unique skills.

A defenseman doesn't see the game the same way a forward does.

A goalie doesn't train the same way a defenseman does.

Because of that, position-specific instruction became a major component of our model.

Forwards work on offensive habits.

Defensemen work on defensive details.

Goalies receive specialized instruction.

The objective is simple:

Train athletes according to the demands of their position.

## **Video Accelerates Learning**

One of the most valuable tools we've utilized over the years is video.

Players often think they understand what happened during a game.

Video allows them to see what actually happened.

It removes emotion.

It removes assumptions.

It creates teaching opportunities.

Some of the greatest improvements we've witnessed have occurred inside the video room.

Because learning often begins when athletes can clearly see their own decisions.

## **Strength Training and Athletic Development**

Hockey players are athletes first.

That's why the Den of Development includes specialized training throughout the week.

Programs may include:

Flexibility

Power Development

Conditioning

## **Strength Training**

Mobility

Recovery

The goal is not simply to create hockey players.

The goal is to create better athletes.

## **Academics Matter**

One of the most overlooked aspects of development is academic success.

At Merrill Fay Arena, classroom time became part of the development process.

Players are students as well as athletes.

By providing dedicated academic time and support, we help athletes build habits that extend beyond the rink.

The reality is that development should prepare players for life, not just hockey.

## **Development Is a System**

Over the years, one lesson has become increasingly clear:

Organizations don't develop players because they have great intentions.

Organizations develop players because they have great systems.

The Den of Development was never built around a single coach.

It was never built around one team.

It was never built around one season.

It was built around a repeatable process.

A system.

One that has helped hundreds of athletes improve both on and off the ice.

## **The Laconia Lesson**

Many organizations ask:

"What development program should we run?"

I believe the better question is:

“What development system are we building?”

Programs come and go.

Players graduate.

Coaches move on.

Systems remain.

The organizations that consistently produce results are rarely the organizations doing the most.

They are the organizations doing the right things consistently.

Because development is not an event.

Development is a system.

And systems create sustainable success.

## **Key Takeaways for Operators**

- Development should be intentional.
- Build systems, not events.
- Position-specific training matters.
- Video accelerates learning.
- Athletic development supports hockey development.
- Academics are part of player development.
- Structure creates consistency.
- Sustainable organizations create repeatable development models.

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## Part 4: Recruiting Without Selling



The Laconia Blueprint Part 4

Recruiting Without Selling: Why Honesty Wins in the Long Run

One of the biggest mistakes I see in junior hockey is organizations treating recruiting like a sales contest.

The goal becomes convincing players to sign.

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The goal becomes filling roster spots.

The goal becomes winning the recruiting battle.

At the New England Wolves, we've always viewed recruiting differently.

We don't believe our job is to sell players.

We believe our job is to help players find the right path.

That may sound simple, but it changes everything.

### **The Problem with Over-Recruiting**

One of the realities of junior hockey is that many organizations recruit significantly more players than they can realistically play.

Every year players and families hear promises.

Every year players arrive expecting opportunities.

Every year some discover there simply isn't room.

The numbers often tell the story.

Looking at EHL roster data from Elite Prospects, many organizations routinely carried well beyond the standard 30-player roster threshold. Some organizations carried 35, 40, or even more players throughout the season. Meanwhile, the Wolves remained at or near the roster limit. The objective wasn't to accumulate players. The objective was to develop the players who committed to our program. (Elite Prospects)

Our philosophy has always been simple:

If we recruit you, we should have a plan for you.

That doesn't mean every player receives the same role.

It doesn't mean every player receives the same ice time.

It means we are honest about where they fit and how they can improve.

## **Recruiting Starts with Truth**

Families are smarter than many organizations realize.

Players talk.

Parents talk.

Coaches talk.

If you're promising things that never happen, eventually the truth catches up.

We've always tried to be honest about:

Where a player fits

What level they can reach

What they need to improve

What opportunities may exist after junior hockey

Sometimes that honesty costs you a commitment.

That's okay.

Because the wrong player in the wrong situation helps nobody.

## **There Is More Than One Successful Path**

One of the things I'm most proud of is that we've never defined success by one destination.

Some players want NCAA hockey.

Some players pursue ACHA opportunities.

Some players continue into professional hockey.

Some players simply want to continue playing while earning a degree.

All of those are successful outcomes.

In fact, according to Eastern Hockey League advancement data, the Wolves have become one of the league's strongest pathways for players advancing to ACHA hockey. The program has been recognized as a leader in EHLP-to-ACHA advancement, helping numerous athletes continue both their academic and athletic careers. (New England Wolves)

We've also produced numerous professional players who have gone on to compete throughout North America and Europe. Elite Prospects continues to track former Wolves players competing professionally and collegiately around the world. (Elite Prospects)

The lesson is simple:

Success isn't one destination.

Success is helping players reach the destination that's right for them.

## **Recruiting Nationally and Internationally**

One of the advantages we've developed over time is the ability to recruit both nationally and internationally.

If Day 2 of this series was about "Fishing in Other Ponds," this is what that looks like in practice.

The Wolves have welcomed players from across the United States, Canada, and Europe.

Those international relationships have helped bring tremendous talent into the program.

Players such as:

Julius Kvandal

Dominiks Marcinkevics

Lukas Bukatovs

Matej Kraus

have all helped demonstrate that Laconia can be a destination for talented players from around the world. Many international Wolves players have gone on to become league award winners, top performers, college athletes, and professional players. (Elite Prospects)

The reality is that geography is no longer a recruiting limitation.

Relationships matter more than geography.

Reputation matters more than geography.

Results matter more than geography.

## **Great Organizations Attract Players**

Many junior teams spend enormous amounts of time trying to convince players to join.

We've always believed the better approach is to build something worth joining.

Development.

Housing.

Community.

Academics.

Culture.

Advancement.

Those things become your recruiters.

Over time, players begin talking.

Parents begin talking.

Advisors begin talking.

Coaches begin talking.

Your alumni begin talking.

And recruiting becomes less about selling and more about sharing what already exists.

## **The Laconia Lesson**

The best recruiting strategy isn't a recruiting strategy at all.

It's building an organization that consistently delivers on its promises.

We've never tried to be everything to everyone.

We've tried to be honest.

We've tried to provide opportunities.

We've tried to help players pursue whatever path makes sense for them.

NCAA.

ACHA.

Professional hockey.

Or simply becoming a better student, athlete, and person.

Because at the end of the day, recruiting isn't about filling a roster.

It's about helping young people find the right opportunity.

And the organizations that do that consistently are usually the organizations that never have to sell very hard.

## **Key Takeaways for Operators**

- Don't over-recruit.
- Recruit players you have a plan for.
- Be honest about opportunities.
- Define success in multiple ways.
- NCAA, ACHA, and Pro hockey are all valuable outcomes.

- Build national and international recruiting pipelines.
- Reputation is your best recruiter.
- Great organizations attract players.

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### **Topics include:**

Recruiting Systems

Player Advancement

Housing Programs

Development Models

Organizational Growth

Community Engagement

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Sources: EHL advancement data and Wolves advancement records. (New England Wolves)

## Part 5: Housing

The Laconia Blueprint Part 5

Housing: Do It Right to Win in the Long Run

One of the least talked about competitive advantages in junior hockey has nothing to do with coaching, recruiting, or player development.

It's housing.

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Every year, parents entrust junior hockey organizations with something far more important than a hockey player.

They entrust them with their son.

For many athletes, junior hockey is the first time they have lived away from home.

That experience can shape their hockey career, their education, and their personal development.

That's why I've always believed housing is not an operational task.

Housing is a development tool.

### **The Shortcut Many Organizations Take**

Throughout junior hockey, there are organizations that rely on dorm-style living arrangements or large player houses.

Sometimes you'll find eight, ten, or even more players living together.

While these arrangements can appear convenient, they often create challenges.

Limited supervision.

Poor nutrition.

Distractions.

Less accountability.

Players essentially raising other players.

The reality is that most 18- to 20-year-olds do not need less structure.

They need more.

## **Why the Wolves Chose Billet Families**

Since arriving in Laconia, the Wolves have remained committed to the billet family model.

Rather than placing players in dormitories or large player houses, our athletes live with local families throughout the community.

This creates something that many organizations struggle to replicate:

A home environment.

Players have structure.

Players have accountability.

Players have support.

Players have relationships.

Most importantly, players have people who genuinely care about them beyond hockey.

According to our housing model, Wolves players receive housing with carefully selected host families, including meals and family support throughout the season.

## **Relationships Matter**

One of the most remarkable things about our housing program is the consistency.

Many of our host families have been opening their homes to Wolves players for more than ten years.

Think about that.

For over a decade, these families have welcomed athletes from across North America and Europe into their homes.

Over time, these relationships become much more than housing arrangements.

Players become part of the family.

Host parents attend games.

They celebrate successes.

They support players through adversity.

Many remain connected long after junior hockey ends.

You simply don't create those relationships in an animal house.

## **Nutrition and Daily Support**

One of the biggest advantages of the billet family model is daily living support.

At the Wolves, players receive:

A safe family environment

Supervision and accountability

Two meals per day within the home

Transportation support when necessary

Guidance and mentorship

A stable living environment

For many players, these simple daily habits become the foundation for success.

Good sleep.

Good meals.

Good routines.

Good decisions.

Player development isn't just what happens at the rink.

It's what happens between practices.

## **Housing Is Part of Your Culture**

One mistake many operators make is viewing housing as separate from organizational culture.

In reality, housing may be one of the biggest drivers of culture.

When players are living in positive environments, everything improves.

Academics improve.

Nutrition improves.

Attendance improves.

Behavior improves.

Accountability improves.

The best billet families become extensions of your coaching staff.

Not because they're teaching systems.

Because they're helping develop responsible young adults.

## **The Laconia Lesson**

When organizations ask me about building sustainable junior hockey programs, I often tell them this:

Your housing system is your culture system.

Players can tolerate a lot of things.

But if they don't feel comfortable where they live, everything becomes harder.

For nearly a decade, the Wolves have invested in building relationships with billet families who care about our athletes.

Those relationships have become one of the most valuable assets our organization possesses.

The lesson is simple:

Don't look for the easiest housing solution.

Look for the best housing solution.

Because when players feel at home, they perform better.

And when organizations prioritize people over convenience, everyone wins.

## **Key Takeaways for Operators**

- Housing is a development tool.
- Avoid “animal house” environments.
- Billet families provide structure and accountability.
- Relationships matter.
- Nutrition matters.
- Housing impacts culture.
- Long-term billet families create organizational stability.
- Players perform better when they feel at home.

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Organizational Structure

Community Engagement

Long-Term Sustainability

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## **About Andrew Trimble**

Andrew Trimble is the co-owner of the New England Wolves Hockey Club, founder of Scoring Concepts, creator of AI Hockey Advisor, author, and hockey development coach.

Through nearly a decade of operating junior hockey programs in Laconia, New Hampshire, he has helped build one of New England's most stable player development environments through a focus on culture, community, development, and long-term sustainability.

## Part 6: Community Support



The Laconia Blueprint Part 6

Building Community Support Beyond the Rink

This may be the most important article in the entire series because community support is what transforms a hockey team into a lasting organization.

When people talk about successful junior hockey organizations, they usually focus on recruiting.

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Or player development.

Or wins and losses.

Those things matter.

But after nearly a decade operating the New England Wolves in Laconia, I've learned something important:

The strongest organizations are built far beyond the rink.

One of the reasons many junior hockey teams struggle is because they become isolated from their communities.

The team exists.

Games are played.

Players come and go.

But the organization never truly becomes part of the town.

Eventually support fades.

Attendance declines.

Relationships disappear.

The foundation becomes unstable.

We wanted something different.

## **Learning from the Laconia Leafs**

Before the Wolves arrived, the Laconia Leafs spent years competing in the Atlantic Junior Hockey League.

While the Leafs struggled on the ice, one thing they were widely respected for was their commitment to community service.

When we took over hockey operations in Laconia, we made a conscious decision.

We weren't going to replace everything.

We were going to preserve the best parts of what came before us.

Community involvement was one of those things.

In many ways, the Wolves embraced that philosophy and expanded upon it.

The goal wasn't simply to have a hockey team.

The goal was to become part of the community.

## **More Than 1,000 Hours of Service**

Today, Wolves players complete more than 1,000 hours of community service annually.

Think about that number.

More than 1,000 hours invested back into the Lakes Region.

Not because it's required for publicity.

Because it's part of our culture.

Players volunteer.

Players give back.

Players learn that leadership extends beyond the scoreboard.

Community service isn't something we do after hockey.

Community service is part of hockey.

## **Food Drives, Equipment Drives, and Supply Drives**

Every year our players participate in initiatives designed to help local families and organizations.

Food drives.

Equipment drives.

Supply drives.

These projects accomplish two things.

First, they help people who need assistance.

Second, they teach players perspective.

It's easy for young athletes to become consumed by goals, points, and statistics.

Community involvement reminds them that there are bigger things in life.

That lesson matters.

## **The JBT Game**

Perhaps no event better represents the Wolves' commitment to community than the annual JBT Game.

What started as a meaningful event has grown into one of the most impactful traditions in our organization.

Over the years, the JBT Game has helped raise more than \$350,000 for the Cure Starts Now Foundation.

Think about that.

A junior hockey event generating more than a third of a million dollars for pediatric cancer research and awareness.

That's far bigger than hockey.

That's impact.

Those are the moments people remember.

## **Building the Next Generation**

One of my favorite traditions each year involves our youth hockey players.

The Wolves regularly host:

Youth tournaments

Jamborees

Community events

End-of-season celebrations

These events create connections between junior players and younger athletes.

The younger players see role models.

The junior players learn leadership.

Everyone benefits.

For many youth players, their first interaction with junior hockey happens through one of these events.

Years later, some become Wolves players themselves.

That's how communities grow.

## **Team Parties Matter Too**

When people hear the word "culture," they often think about practices and games.

Culture is much bigger than that.

Some of our strongest relationships have been built through:

Holiday parties

Team dinners

Community gatherings

Family events

Billet family celebrations

These moments create memories.

They create connections.

They create loyalty.

The strongest organizations understand that people stay connected to experiences, not schedules.

## **Community Is a Competitive Advantage**

Many organizations view community engagement as something nice to do.

I view it differently.

I believe it's a competitive advantage.

Communities support organizations that support them.

Host families become ambassadors.

Sponsors become advocates.

Fans become supporters.

Relationships create opportunities.

Over time, those relationships become one of the most valuable assets an organization can possess.

You can't buy that.

You have to earn it.

## **The Laconia Lesson**

The biggest lesson we've learned in Laconia is simple:

Hockey organizations that only take from a community rarely last.

Organizations that invest in a community become part of it.

The Wolves have tried to build something bigger than a hockey team.

We've tried to build relationships.

We've tried to build traditions.

We've tried to build impact.

Because when hockey becomes part of the community, the community begins supporting hockey.

And that's when organizations become sustainable.

## **Hockey Builds More Than Players.**

## **Hockey Builds Community.**

### **Key Takeaways for Operators**

- Community support must be intentional.
- Preserve the best traditions that came before you.
- Service creates connection.
- Youth events help build future players and fans.
- Team culture extends beyond the rink.
- Community engagement creates long-term stability.
- Relationships are an organization's most valuable asset.
- Sustainable organizations invest in their communities.

## **Free Junior Hockey Operator Consultation**

As part of The Laconia Blueprint series, I am offering a limited number of free Zoom consultations for junior hockey owners, operators, coaches, and leadership groups.

## **Topics include:**

Community Engagement

Housing Systems

Recruiting

Development Models

Organizational Growth

Long-Term Sustainability

Schedule Your Free Zoom Consultation Below

scoringconcepts@gmail.com

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Through nearly a decade in Laconia, New Hampshire, he has helped build one of New England's most community-focused junior hockey organizations through a commitment to development, service, relationships, and long-term sustainability.

## Part 7: Operator Scorecard

***Use the scorecard to evaluate the health of a junior hockey organization beyond wins and losses.***

The Laconia Blueprint Part 7

The Junior Hockey Operator Scorecard

Over the past week, we've explored the pillars that helped shape the New England Wolves organization in Laconia.

We've discussed:

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Stability

Understanding Your Market

Development Systems

Recruiting

Housing

Community Engagement

Each of those topics contributes to something larger:

Organizational Sustainability.

One of the biggest mistakes I see in junior hockey is organizations evaluating themselves only by wins and losses.

Winning matters.

But winning alone does not determine whether an organization is healthy.

Some teams win games and disappear.

Others build foundations that last for decades.

The question every operator should ask is:

“How healthy is my organization?”

The following scorecard is designed to help answer that question.

## **Category 1: Stability**

Does your organization have:

Consistent ownership?

Consistent leadership?

Long-term planning?

Staff retention?

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Constant turnover

4-6 = Some consistency

7-8 = Stable foundation

9-10 = Long-term organizational strength

## **Category 2: Understanding Your Market**

Do you understand:

Your recruiting territory?

Your player pool?

Your competition?

Your community?

Can you “Fish in Other Ponds” when necessary?

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = No clear market strategy

4-6 = Some recruiting structure

7-8 = Strong market understanding

9-10 = Diverse recruiting pipelines

### **Category 3: Development**

Do you have:

Structured development?

Video review?

Strength training?

Hockey IQ training?

Individual development plans?

Or are you simply running practices?

### **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Basic team practices only

4-6 = Some development systems

7-8 = Comprehensive development model

9-10 = Development embedded into culture

### **Category 4: Recruiting**

Does your recruiting philosophy focus on:

Honesty?

Fit?

Long-term success?

Advancement?

Or simply filling roster spots?

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Reactive recruiting

4-6 = Average recruiting systems

7-8 = Strong recruiting process

9-10 = Reputation-driven recruiting

## **Category 5: Housing**

Do your players experience:

Structure?

Accountability?

Family support?

Healthy living environments?

Or are they simply housed?

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Housing problems common

4-6 = Functional housing model

7-8 = Strong billet culture

9-10 = Housing as a competitive advantage

## **Category 6: Community Impact**

Does your organization:

Volunteer?

Support local causes?

Build community relationships?

Create positive visibility?

Or does it only exist inside the rink?

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Little community involvement

4-6 = Occasional involvement

7-8 = Strong community presence

9-10 = Community institution

## **Category 7: Advancement**

How effectively are you helping players move forward?

Consider:

NCAA advancement

ACHA advancement

Professional advancement

Academic success

Personal growth

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Limited advancement

4-6 = Some advancement

7-8 = Consistent advancement

9-10 = Proven advancement pathway

## **Category 8: Financial Sustainability**

Perhaps the most important category.

Can your organization survive long term?

Evaluate:

Budget management

Revenue streams

Sponsorships

Enrollment

Operational planning

## **Score Yourself**

1-3 = Significant risk

4-6 = Financially stable

7-8 = Healthy operation

9-10 = Sustainable growth model

## **Final Score**

Add your scores together.

8-24 Points

At Risk

Your organization is surviving rather than growing.

Major improvements are needed.

25-48 Points

Stable

You have a foundation.

Now it's time to strengthen weak areas.

49-64 Points

Growth Mode

Your organization has momentum.

Focus on refinement and scalability.

65-80 Points

Sustainable

You have built systems capable of long-term success.

Continue investing in culture, relationships, and leadership.

## **The Laconia Lesson**

Over the past decade, we've learned that sustainable organizations are rarely built by accident.

They're built through thousands of small decisions.

The right staff.

The right culture.

The right development model.

The right housing.

The right community relationships.

The right recruiting philosophy.

No single factor creates success.

The combination does.

The purpose of this series was never to suggest there is only one way to operate a junior hockey organization.

Rather, it was to share lessons learned from building one in Laconia, New Hampshire.

Some ideas may fit your market.

Others may not.

But every organization should be asking the same question:

Are we building something that can last?

Because in junior hockey, sustainability isn't measured in seasons.

It's measured in decades.

## **Thank You**

Thank you to our players.

Our families.

Our billet families.

Our staff.

Our volunteers.

Our sponsors.

Our community partners.

And everyone who has supported the New England Wolves over the years.

This blueprint was built together.

## **Free Junior Hockey Operator Consultation**

If you'd like to discuss your organization's operations, recruiting, development systems, housing, community engagement, or long-term sustainability, I'd be happy to connect.

Schedule a Free 30-Minute Zoom Consultation

Let's talk hockey.

scoringconcepts@gmail.com

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