

Event guide: Ice hockey

Ice hockey is one of the fastest and most physical sports in the world, let alone the Winter Olympics.

When 12 players come together on the ice and attempt to hit a small rubber object into a small metal cage, the results can be pretty spectacular.

HOW THE COMPETITION UNFOLDS

Venue : Palasport Olimpico
Competition dates: 11-26 Feb
 Holders
Men - Canada
Women - Canada

The 12 qualifiers are divided into two groups of six.

Each country plays each team in their group once, with the top four teams from each group going through to the quarter-finals.

The four fixtures depend on the final group positions, so the team that tops Group A plays the team that finished fourth in Group B.

The winners of the quarter-finals go through to the semi-finals.

The two winners qualify for the final, while the two losers go through to the bronze medal play-off.

THE GAME

The object of the game is simple - score more goals than the opposition. Goals are scored by hitting a rubberised disc called a puck into a goal.

A game is divided into three 20-minute periods, with each period restarted with a face-off, where two opposing players attempt to gain possession of the puck after it is dropped in the centre circle by the referee.

Each squad consists of up to 20 players in the men's competition and 18 in the women's.

There are unlimited substitutions, but a team can only have a maximum of six players on the ice at any one time while play is in progress.

PENALTIES

A player can legitimately use their shoulder or hip to challenge a player in possession of the puck.

This is called body-checking and is perfectly legal. However, referees are tough on illegal body contact, which is punishable by a penalty and time in the sin-bin.

If a player is sent to the sin-bin, the advantage to the opposition is called a powerplay.

Penalties are given for:

- Illegal use of the stick
- Tripping, kneeling or kicking
- Roughness or fisticuffs

- Holding an opponent
- Obstructing an opponent
- Illegally checking an opponent
- Abuse of officials

The duration of penalties depends on the severity of the offence.

A two-minute minor penalty is called for lesser infringements, while five-minute major penalties or 10-minute misconduct penalties can also be given.

Game misconduct, gross misconduct or match penalties are awarded for more serious offences. These rule the player out for the rest of the game and can result in further suspension.

However the team is not penalised and can continue to have five players on the ice at any one time.

Minor penalties finish when the time runs out or the other team scores on the powerplay.

Players can also be given double minor penalties. These are two consecutive two-minute penalties.

If a score occurs on the first minor, the remaining time is then erased and the second two-minute period begins immediately.

However major penalties must be served for the full five-minute duration regardless of goals scored.

Ice hockey has a reputation for the odd fight, which the authorities are keen to eradicate. Any player guilty of starting a fight or of excessive roughness is thrown out of the game.

As well as skates, players need ample protection from the puck, which can fly around at high speed.

Equipment usually consists of:

- Shin pads
- Throat protector
- Helmet
- Facemask
- Shoulder pads
- Elbow pads
- Gloves
- Stick

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

There are a number of ice rinks and ice hockey clubs across England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

Eight teams play in the Elite Ice Hockey League, which has teams from all four home nations.

All the clubs run their own development programmes to encourage young people to take up ice hockey.

The English Ice Hockey Association has a website for all levels of the game in England.

And the Scottish Ice Hockey Association has a website for all levels of the game in Scotland.

Story from BBC SPORT:

http://news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/sport1/hi/other_sports/ice_hockey/4449550.stm

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