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**Economic Impact of Youth Hockey Tournaments:  
A Case Study of the La Crosse and Onalaska  
Ice Rinks**

By

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and  
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**AGRICULTURAL &  
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**STAFF PAPER SERIES**

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# Economic Impact of Youth Hockey Tournaments: A Case Study of the La Crosse and Onalaska Ice Rinks

## I. Introduction

Youth hockey is a major recreational and family event in Wisconsin and throughout the upper Midwest. Formal programs exist for youth simply interested in learning skating skills and the fundamentals of hockey to those interesting in competing in national and international tournaments. Demand for "ice-time" at the available indoor ice rinks have youth hockey players skating in the early hours of the morning before school and into the evening. In response to the growing popularity of youth hockey, a number of formal associations, such as the Onalaska/Holmen Tornado Youth Hockey Association and the River City Youth Hockey Association, have been formed to coordinate a range of learning opportunities and formal team tournaments.

Youth hockey tournaments have become a major part of the Wisconsin winter recreational landscape over the past decade. The most frequent response on the survey regarding what they enjoyed about the visit was "family time." With the growth and formality of youth hockey associations, the number, frequency and size of weekend youth hockey tournaments has rapidly grown. For communities with well-organized youth hockey associations and superior ice facilities, such tournaments can make significant contributions to the community's tourist economy.

In October of 1999 a representative of River City Youth Hockey requested assistance from the La Crosse County University of Wisconsin-Extension office in determining the impact of youth hockey on the local economy. The county office then involved the UW-Madison/Extension to assist in the study design and data interpretation.

The intent of this study is to examine and document the impact that youth hockey tournaments have on a local economy. The study focuses on youth hockey tournaments that occurred in La Crosse and Onalaska for the winter session of 1999-2000. Survey data were collected from tournament participants during the months of January and February 2000. Volunteers from the local youth hockey associations had adults complete the survey and walked each interviewee through a simple one-page, two sided questionnaire. A total of 373 surveys were completed, 219 from Onalaska and 154 from La Crosse.

This report is composed of five parts beyond the introduction. In the next section we provide a profile of youth hockey tournament participants. We then provide a brief review of the methods used to conduct the economic impact assessment. In the third section we summarize the results of the impact assessment. In the fourth section, we profile other activities such as scheduled games and we close the report with a brief review of key findings and provide some closing observations.

Youth hockey tournaments are almost exclusively a weekend or vacation time activity. The greatest portion of the ice time at rinks is available during the week for games, practices, clinics, and public skating. A portion of this time is for teams to play non-tournament games. These non-tournament games involve a home team and an away team usually from out-of-town.

For the La Crosse Rink in the 1999 – 2000 season there were a total 76 non-tournament home games ranging from Mites to the High School

team. Twenty-five of the away teams came from a distance of 80 plus miles, 26 teams came from a distance of between 26-79 miles, and 26 teams came from a distance of 25 miles or less.

For the Onalaska rink in the 1999 – 2000 season there were 97 non-tournament home games played. This also includes teams from the Mite level to the High School level in boys and from the Squirt level to the High School level for girls. In addition to the 97 home games, due to the lack of available ice time, the boys played 37 home games in La Crescent and the girls played 8 home games in La Crescent. Of the 97 home games there were 37 games against teams traveling a distance of 80 plus miles, 28 games against teams from a distance of between 26-79 miles and 32 games against teams from 25 or less miles. There were 2,595 individual visiting team participants in the non-tournament week time games conducted at both the La Crosse and Onalaska rinks.

For these single non-tournament games the vast majority of individual participants travel to and from the game the same day and do not stay overnight. The number of fans for each game varies greatly. Most of the fans consist of friends and family of the participants. High School game fans consist of youth and adults from the communities involved in the game. Attendance ranges from 50 or less for some younger youth games to up to 1,000 for certain High School games

Tournament registration fees average \$350 per tournament per team. Tournament gate fees are \$5 per non-participant. While these dollars stay within the Hockey Associations they are funds that go to pay for ice time, referees, trophies, and other incidentals associated with the tournaments. The tournaments are a fundraiser for the associations through concessions and sales of hockey related items. Referees are paid per game and involve both

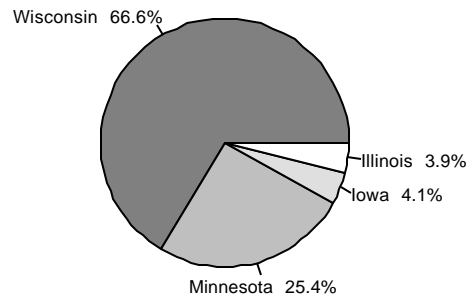
adults and youth depending upon the level of play that they are officiating.

A copy of the questionnaire is included as Appendix 1 of this report. The last three questions were; What have you enjoyed most about your visit? What have you enjoyed least about your visit? What else could we do to make you trip more enjoyable? These results are available upon request and will be used by the associations to better conduct tournaments, games and activities as well as serving the needs of out-of-town guests. In general the individuals completing the survey were very obliging in providing time to complete the survey. There were a number of requests from visiting teams for the results of this survey.

## II. Visitor Profile

Not surprisingly, the majority of youth hockey tournament participants at the La Crosse and Onalaska facilities are from Wisconsin. As depicted in Figure 1, 66.6 percent of the surveyed participants are from Wisconsin, but one in four (25.4 percent) are from Minnesota and 4.1 percent travel from Iowa and 3.9 are from Illinois.

**Figure 1: Residency of Tournament Participants**



Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

Given the location of the facilities the high percentage from Minnesota and more modest number from Iowa is not surprising, but

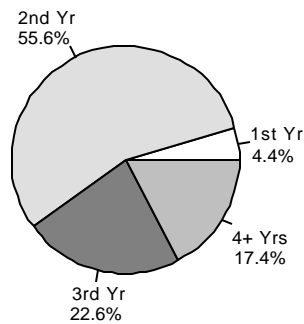
participants traveling from as far away as Illinois hints at the commitment that some youth hockey participants have in the sport. One adult commented on the question regarding whether the trip was a family function “This is our way of life.”

While none participated in this study, interviewees mentioned that it is not uncommon to have teams travel from throughout the Midwest as far as Nebraska and indeed from Canada for special tournaments. One tournament participant included in the survey traveled from Philadelphia.

While the clear majority of youth hockey participants traveled from within Wisconsin, only a handful was from the La Crosse and Onalaska areas. Participants travel from all corners of Wisconsin including Brookfield and Milwaukee, Janesville, Green Bay and Onieda to name a few.

A second potential reason for the low number of tournaments attended away from home is the relatively newness of youth hockey to many of today’s participants. The majority (55.5 percent) of respondents stated that this is only their second year involved in youth hockey tournaments (Figure 2). The average number of years involved is slightly less than two at 1.8. This is partially a reflection of the recent growth in interest in youth hockey but also a reflection of the growth in and maturing of youth hockey associations.

**Figure 2 Number of Years in Youth Hockey**

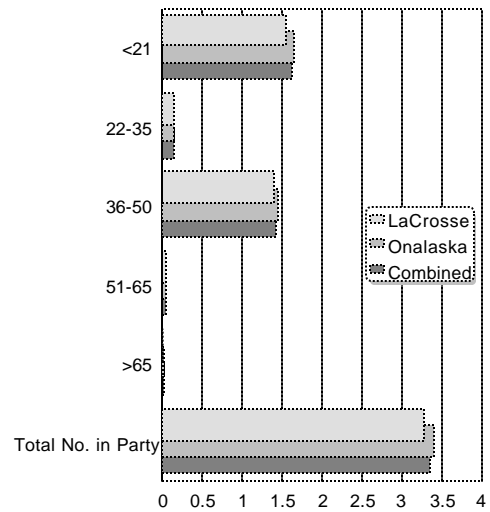


Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

Youth are most likely involved in hockey for several years before participating in tournaments. Still, slightly less than one in five participants have been involved in youth hockey tournaments for four or more years. This latter group includes not only young children moving through the age categories, but also families with more than one child interested in participating in organized hockey activities. One individual commented that she was a single parent and this was a weekend with her son.

If one examines the age profile of the groups attending youth hockey tournaments at the La Crosse and Onalaska facilities during January and February, it becomes clear that these are family-type events. Numerous respondents said the thing they enjoyed was watching their child play hockey. Nearly half, 48.5 percent are under the age of 21 and 42.9 percent are between the age of 21 and 50 (Figure 3). Given the nature of the tournaments, this result is as expected. When queried, nearly all (93.2 percent) reported that attendance of the tournament was considered a family function.

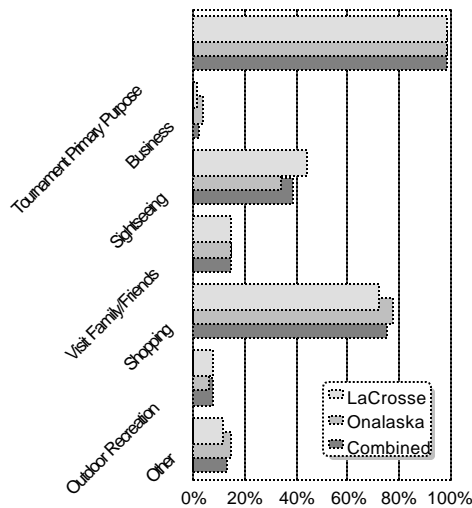
**Figure 3 Age Distribution of Party (Ave No. in Party)**



Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

While the vast majority (99.2 percent) reported that attending the youth hockey tournament was the primary purpose of the trip, many tournament attendees reported that they did participate in other activities while in the area (Figure 4). Many (38.9 percent) reported that they went sightseeing in the area three in four (75.8 percent) stated that they went shopping while in the area, either for specific items that they needed or for souvenirs of their visit to the area and participation in the tournament. Smaller percentages reported visiting friends and family and a handful conducted business while in the area. One individual said they enjoyed visiting their daughter at U.W. La Crosse while others commented on the great scenery, great shopping and great restaurants.

**Figure 4 Uses of Trip  
Percent Responding "Yes"**

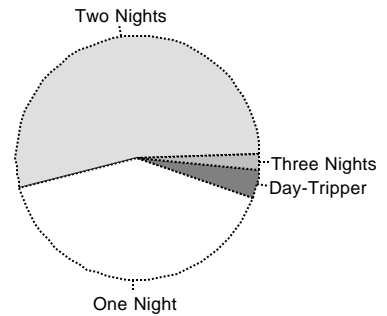


Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

Because of the design of youth hockey tournaments, it is difficult for teams from outside the local area to travel to and from the tournament daily. Based on the respondents to the survey, only 3.5 percent did not stay overnight for at least one night (Figure 5). Less than half (41.0 percent) stayed one night in the area while slightly more than half (53.4 percent) stayed two nights. Only a small handful (2.2 percent) stayed three

nights in the area. One respondent stated: "If we would have known how nice your facility and community is we would have come earlier and spend an extra day." Another individual commented "The friendliness of everyone, everywhere that includes the people running the tournament, the lodge manager and definitely Marty the Butcher at Festival."

**Figure 5 Distribution of Number of Nights Stayed**



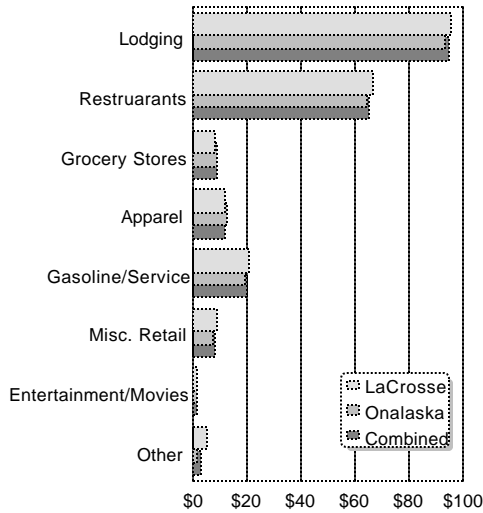
Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

Partially because of the scheduling of specific games in the tournament, many travel to the tournament late Friday or very early Saturday morning and return Sunday afternoon or early evening. While some elect to stay at the ice-rink for a significant part of the tournament, many take advantage of being in the area to go sightseeing, visiting friends and relatives and/or go shopping (Figure 6).

To assess the economic impact of youth hockey tournaments on the local economy, special attention is paid to the spending patterns of tournament participants. A total of eight commodity groups were identified for the purpose of soliciting expenditure patterns of tournament participants: accommodations; restaurants; grocery stores; apparel; gasoline and service stations; miscellaneous retail; movies and other entertainment; and a general other category. Each tournament participant within the sample was asked to estimate how much their

party (i.e., family and/or group) spent or plan on spending in a typical day while in the area. A summary of these expenditure patterns is reported in Table 1 and Figure 6.

**Figure 6 Average Expenditure Patterns**



Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

The nature of youth hockey tournaments dictates that the major categories of expenditures are overnight lodging and restaurants. The average party spent about \$95 per day for lodging which is reflective of typical hotel and motel rates in the study area. Typical expenditures for eating includes about \$66 per day in restaurants also about \$9 in grocery store purchases. These latter purchases might be for in-room consumption or for the return trip home.

Other major categories of expenditures includes about \$21 for gasoline and car servicing, and \$13 for apparel. The latter is most often hockey

related apparel or souvenirs of the tournament or trip in general. These expenditures are no doubt conservative as the survey was taken on Saturday morning in most cases and all expenditures are not fully accounted for. Total per day expenditures for the typical party participating in a youth hockey tournament is about \$220 with a slightly higher level in La Crosse than Onalaska.

Given the number of tournaments hosted by the ice-rinks in Lacrosse and Onalaska, we estimate that there are about 1,845 individual youth participating. This translates into 1,845 parties, or about 6,458 persons including players and other party members. Given that one team from either La Crosse or Onalaska generally hosts any given tournament, this translates into about 1,575 players, or parties, traveling to the area to participate in the tournaments. Given an average per party expenditure level of \$440 (2 days), youth hockey tournaments inject slightly less than \$700,000 of new spending into the local economy.

### III Economic Impact Methods

In addition to developing a general profile of the participants of youth hockey tournaments, a focal point of this study is to assess the economic impact of these tournaments on the La Crosse/Onalaska area. For this study, the impact of the tournaments comes from the spending of nearly \$700,000 in the local economy.

**Table 1 Average Expenditure Per Party**

	LaCrosse	Onalaska	Combined	Total Expenditure
Lodging	\$ 96.69	\$ 94.41	\$ 95.58	\$ 295,342
Restaurants	\$ 67.83	\$ 65.18	\$ 66.30	\$ 204,867
Grocery Stores	\$ 9.20	\$ 9.42	\$ 9.33	\$ 28,830
Apparel	\$ 12.41	\$ 13.13	\$ 12.83	\$ 39,645
Gasoline/Service	\$ 21.41	\$ 20.41	\$ 20.83	\$ 64,365
Misc. Retail	\$ 9.84	\$ 8.01	\$ 8.78	\$ 27,130
Entertainment/Movies	\$ 2.29	\$ 1.95	\$ 2.09	\$ 6,458
Other	\$ 6.22	\$ 2.22	\$ 3.91	\$ 12,082
Total	\$ 225.89	\$ 214.73	\$ 219.65	\$ 678,719

Once the expenditures were gathered, the economic impact assessment was conducted using a model of the La Crosse County economy. The model, developed for this study by the authors, is a standard input-output model of the County's economy. At the heart of the La Crosse County input-output model is the *transactions table*. The transactions table maps all flows between buyers and sellers in the economy. One could think of the transactions table as a spreadsheet of the economy with buyers along the columns and sellers down the rows. Individual cells where columns and rows intersect capture the interactions between that particular buyer and seller.

By altering these flows between buyers and sellers, one can trace the impact of that change on the whole of the economy. In this case, new buyers are introduced in the form of youth hockey tournament participants and sellers are lodging establishments, restaurants, gas stations, and grocery stores among others. By using the detailed information contained in Table 1 and Figure 6 an assessment of the economic impact of youth hockey tournaments was undertaken. In addition, there is nearly \$45,000 paid in tournament registration fees above and beyond the actual expenditures by participants and their families at the tournament itself.

#### IV Economic Impact Results

The economic impact of the youth hockey tournaments hosted at the La Crosse and Onalaska ice-rinks is summarized in Table 2 below. In total, the nearly \$700,000 in new expenditures brought into the region translates into about 15 jobs and slightly more than \$330,000 in aggregate income. Of this \$330,000 in income, \$210,000 is in the form of labor income, or wages and salaries. The balance of the income is in the form of proprietor income, rents, and profits.

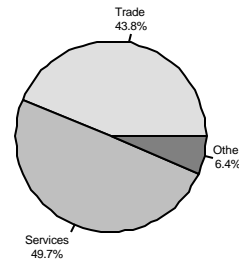
Given the nature of the event examined, it is not surprising that the

Table 2 Economic Impact Summary

	Direct	Total	Multiplier
Jobs	11.4	14.8	1.3
Labor Income	\$141,950	\$209,700	1.48
Total Income	\$211,100	\$331,900	1.57

bulk of the economic impact falls into the Trade (i.e., retail and whole) and Service (e.g., restaurants and lodging) sectors. Nearly half (49.6 percent) of the employment impact falls into the Services sector and 43.7 percent goes into Retail (Figure 7). The remaining 6.7 percent of the employment impact is scattered across a range of other sectors, but accounts for less than one job in aggregate.

Figure 7 Distribution of Economic Impact Jobs

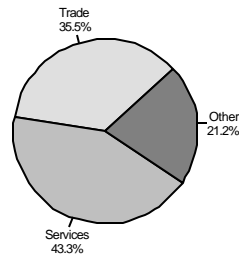


Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

In terms of Total Income, a slightly different distribution becomes apparent. Although Trade and Services still account for the majority, at 35.5 and 43.3 percent respectively, the general category Other accounts for 21.2 percent of income (Figure 8). In other words, Total Income for each job created in the Trade sector is about \$17,600 and about \$18,900 for each job in the Services sector. For the broader Other category, Total Income is about \$68,500 per job created.



**Figure 8 Distribution of Economic Impact  
Total Income**



Source: University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension

Two general observations can help explain the differences between Figures 7 and 8. First, the estimate of jobs includes both part- and full-time jobs. For the Trade and Services sectors, some of these jobs may be part-time in nature. Second, when one considers the types of jobs in lodging, restaurants, auto service stations, general retail stores, and grocery stores, these tend to be modestly paid jobs.

## **V Summary and Conclusions**

Youth hockey is becoming an increasingly popular sport in Wisconsin and throughout the US and Canada. While youth join formal teams for a range of reasons, participation in organized tournaments is becoming increasingly important. These events become family vacations with family

groups enjoying hospitality, attractions and social interaction with other hockey families and tourism oriented establishments. While some youth participate in only non-tournament games, there are a number of youth hockey teams that travel great distances to participate in a range of tournaments.

This study is designed to profile participants in formal youth hockey tournaments in La Crosse and Onalaska. The vast majority of tournament participants who took part of this study view these weekend events as time for family and commonly turn the tournament into a small vacation for the family. In this case survey results show an appreciation for the natural beauty, friendliness and diversity of shopping and restaurants available in the La Crosse/Onalaska area.

While on these small family vacations tournament participants spend money in the local economy. Based on survey results, the typical tournament participant and the party that he or she is with stay between one and two nights per tournament and spend about \$220 per day. This injection of "tourist" dollars into the local economy translates into about 15 jobs and \$330,000 in total income.