

# Simplified Rules of Ringette

Ringette combines the speed of hockey, the team play of soccer, and the fast transitions of basketball, making it a fun and challenging sport, and truly the fastest game on ice.

## The Playing Surface

Ringette is played on a rink similar to a hockey rink.

There are five "**free pass circles**" on the ice, two in each end and one at centre ice. Free pass circles are used to start play. Each circle is divided in half, and a team starts play with the ring on the ice in their half of the circle.

The **blue lines** divide the ice into three zones. From one team's perspective, there is the offensive zone (the opponent's end), the neutral zone (the middle of the ice), and the defensive zone. The centre red line is not used in ringette

Just inside the blue line in each end of the ice, a **thin red line** runs across the ice, touching the top of the free pass circles in each end. This line is called the "**free play line**".

The goalie's crease is a semi-circle around the goal mouth, eight feet in radius. (Diagram courtesy Ontario Ringette Association)

## The Players

A team at regular strength plays with a centre, two forwards (wingers), two defenders and a goaltender.

Teams can change players on the ice during a stoppage in play, or they can change "on the fly". If changing on the fly, no more than the regulation number of players can get involved in the play, or a penalty is assessed for too many players on the ice.

At the Novice house league level, a 3 minute buzzer is used to regulate line changes.

## Starting Play

A ringette game is typically organized in two halves of fifteen to twenty minutes duration (depending on the level of play).

To start play, the referee places the ring on the ice in the visiting team's half of the centre free pass circle. There are **no "offsides"** in ringette, so players can line up anywhere on the ice surface. The referee blows the whistle, and the player in the free pass circle has **five seconds to pass** the ring into play. The referee counts the five seconds and signals each passing second by extending her arm. No player is allowed in the free pass circle except the player making the pass. The pass must go beyond the free pass circle, and the passer cannot receive her own pass.

If play is stopped, the referee will award the ring to one team or the other, depending on the reason for the stoppage in play. Unless a team is awarded the ring in its defensive end, the team puts the ring back into play with a free pass from the free pass circle nearest to where the stoppage in play was caused.

At rep level competitions for Tween and older players, a 30 second **shot clock** is being introduced. The clock starts when a team gains possession. If they have not taken a shot on net within 30 seconds, a horn sounds, and the ring is awarded to the other team.

## The Goalie Ring

**No player from either team, except the goaltender, is allowed to enter the goalie's crease, or to play a ring that lies in the crease.** If any part of the ring is touching the crease line, the ring is considered to be in the crease.

If a ring enters the crease, the referee will start a five second count, extending her arm to signal each second. The goalie must put the ring back into play within 5 seconds. Failure to do so will result in a whistle, and a free pass for the offensive side, from one of the free pass circles near the goalie.

The goalie can throw or pass the ring to a teammate, but she cannot throw or pass the ring to herself, and she **cannot throw the ring past her own blue line**. The speed with which the ring is returned to play can create some dynamic transitions from defense to offense.

A goalie cannot draw or carry the ring into her crease from outside the crease. The goalie is allowed to play a ring outside her crease using the blade of her stick (she cannot turn the stick over and stab the ring as if she had a ringette stick).

If the referee stops play and awards the ring to the team in its defensive zone, instead of a free pass, the referee will award the ring to the goaltender. The referee signals this by raising both arms over her head. When the goalie has the ring in hand, the referee sounds the whistle and begins the five second count. Since there are no offsides, there is no need to wait for all the players to line up before play can be resumed. Restarting play on a goalie ring is quick, much like a "throw-in" in soccer or basketball, but even faster because it must be done in 5 seconds.

If a team pulls its goalie for an extra skater, one of those skaters can enter the goal crease and play as if she is a goalie. But she must follow all the rules that a goalie would follow with respect to a goalie ring.

## The Blue Lines

A player skating with a ring **cannot carry the ring over a blue line** – the ring must be passed across the line to another player. The ring carrier's feet can cross the blue line, as long as the ring does not cross the blue line.

**A pass cannot cross two blue lines.** The referee will call the play, and return the ring to the zone where the pass originated.

## The Free Play Line and the Free Play Zone

The area from the free play line to the end boards at each end of the rink is called the Free Play Zone. When teams are at full strength, **only three skaters from either team are allowed into the free play zone**. There is no restriction on which three players can enter the zone, only on the number of players that are in the zone at once.

There is no restriction on carrying or passing the ring over the free play line. Players can exchange the ring as they enter or leave the free play zone, provided no more than three skaters from the same team are in the zone at the same time.

If a team has two or more players in the penalty box, then that team is only allowed two players in the free play zone when the ring is in their end. The third skater must remain outside the zone.

If a team pulls its goalie for an extra skater, it can put the extra skater in the zone.

## Second Possession

Most stoppages in play are for obvious reasons. If a player crosses the blue line, if a goalie is slow to put the ring in play, or if a team is caught with too many players in the zone, it is clear that possession passes to the other team.

Sometimes, play is called because the ring has been “frozen” along the boards, or several players have all got their sticks in the ring, and the ring is not advancing. In this case, the ring is awarded on the basis of “second possession”.

If a player has sole possession of the ring, then control of the ring is hers to lose. If she allows another player to also get possession (to also get her stick in the ring) so that the first player no longer exclusively controls the ring, then the first player is deemed to have lost possession. If play is stopped because the ring is not advancing, **the team whose player gained second possession will be awarded the ring**.

## The Fastest Game on Ice

Ringette features fast transitions and rapid-fire passing. The requirement to pass over the blue line and the limitations of the free play line make passing an essential part of the game. No offsides means the ring can be quickly advanced down the ice. The free pass and the goalie ring allow play to be quickly resumed, much like a free kick in soccer.

The rules of ringette introduce challenges to the game, such as the need for good passing skills, and good conditioning, since the pace is fast.

If your player is new to the game, talk these rules over to reinforce for her the instruction she gets from coaches and referees on the ice. The basic rules are quick to learn, and when players and parents all know the rules, the game is more fun for everyone.