

SPORTS PLANNER – BACKGROUND

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The sports planner sample has its roots in a real life situation. To better understand the different artifacts it is perhaps helpful to have a little of that real life background.

I have two boys that play ice hockey and in Sweden sports are in general organized in non-profit sports clubs¹. Non-profit hockey clubs rarely own their ice rinks but they are typically owned by local government who then allocates times to clubs active in that area for playing games and practice. Most clubs have a number of teams in the club, ranging from hockey school for children in age 5-7 up to representation teams playing in the divisions below the Swedish Elite League.

The different teams participate in lower level and youth leagues that are organized by the Swedish Ice hockey Association and its regional organizations. In addition to the regular league games, teams also participate in different playoffs; participate in tournaments that are played over one or up to a couple of days and also pre-season games that are agreed with teams from other clubs.

For a large club (like Nacka HK where my boys play) the scheduling of practice and games can become very complicated and time consuming for a number of reasons:

- There are quite many groups in the club. We have
 - The hockey school
 - Eight youth/boys teams ranging from 9 year olds up to 16 year olds
 - Two Junior teams ages 17-18 and ages 19-20 respectively
 - One representation team
 - Two veteran teams
- There are lots of games played during a season. Last season more than 200 regular home games were played in the club and in addition to that each team played numerous preseason games, playoff etc.
- Changes in game planning from the ice hockey association can sometimes come at short notice, i.e., teams that pull out of a league or are added to league require schedule adjustments
- The schedule is never the same for any two weeks
- There are many constraints that must be taken into account when preparing the schedule. Certain age groups should practice in a certain time slot, the amount of practice that different age groups should have etc. etc.
- Schedules can during some periods be completed just days in advance. Typically this is the case during playoffs when the game schedule is sometimes known just days in advance.
- Rink time is a scarce resource that must be allocated in an as optimal way as possible
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In short, this is a giant puzzle that needs to be solved on short notice and there are many stakeholders that will get aggravated if the schedule is later than it need to be or if it doesn't reasonably well comply with policies and constraints.

¹ The hockey teams in the Swedish Elite League and the soccer teams in the All-Swedish league are exceptions to this rule as they are more often driven as commercial enterprises.

The example is based on my experience as responsible for ice-time planning in Nacka HK and prior to that in another club.

The example is however not ice hockey specific but rather it is a generalized solution for planning of practices and games for any team sport.

Imagine that we have cooked up a business plan that we believe in and that we now need to develop the product.