



YOUTH HOCKEY ASSOCIATION / OFFICIATING RELATIONSHIPS

Officials play a significant role in the environment that is created for our youth hockey participants. A strong working relationship with the local youth hockey and officiating leaders is important for the overall growth of the game and the ability to create a positive environment for kids to play. When the game is played within an atmosphere that promotes competition in a fun and positive manner, players and parents develop the passion for the game of hockey that is necessary for lifelong participation. The rising cost to play the game is also critical in allowing the game to grow, although officiating and coaching expenses comprise a fraction of these costs. A failure to recognize the officials' role in contributing to this environment makes this objective more difficult and creates difficulties for local volunteer leadership.

In a recent survey conducted of local youth hockey associations, it was discovered that over 2/3^{rd's} of local youth hockey organizations have no formal relationship or direct lines of communication with the officials group that works their games. This disconnect suggests that the environment which could be created is not at a level that is conducive for ultimate success for either group and fails to take advantage of a potential partnership that could greatly benefit the game. This document is designed to present simple concepts and initiatives where these two entities can share responsibility to foster a more positive hockey environment and ease the workload of local volunteers.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

Overall, the USA Hockey Officiating Program has experienced a significant reduction in the number of registered officials during the past few seasons. The concern is whether the number of current officials will be enough at a time when the number of participants in the 8-&-under youth classification is at an all-time high.

The American Development Model is creating an atmosphere that promotes skill development and encourages a life-long passion for the game. These initiatives suggest that there will be a greater number of players in the 12-&-under and older age classifications than ever before. The impact of the reduced number of officials is that there will be a significant decrease in the number of experienced officials to work these older age level games.

In order to reduce this trend, a commitment to recruit new officials along with a greater commitment to retain those good officials that are currently in the program is a must. When surveyed a few years back, those officials who left the program indicated the primary reason for leaving USA Hockey Officiating was the perception of local politics and lack of opportunity. Both local officiating leaders

and local youth hockey association play a role in this area and these types of issues can best be resolved by working together.

The current disconnect that exists between local youth hockey organizations and local officials' groups results in a system that minimizes the opportunity for success in recruiting and retention. A collaborative effort to identify potential officials (mainly players from the youth hockey organization) and then creating the best environment (assignment, officiating systems, Mentoring, Shadowing, Evaluation, opportunity for advancement) in which these officials can develop their skills, gain valuable experience and develop the passion for officiating that will lead to success will best serve the game while providing accountability for the best interest of the game by both parties. This partnership – while still providing ultimate ownership to each group for their respective areas of expertise – where each group has a vested interest in the success of the game will lead to a better game overall.

WHY IS A PARTNERSHIP NECESSARY?

Whether there is a formal relationship between the local youth hockey organization and officiating leaders or simply a strong line of communication, the end result will be more efficient means of dealing with issues of mutual interest. Anytime one side is dictating the requirements and or the needs of the other, there will be a lack of ownership in the final product, which is reflected in the atmosphere in which the game is played. Some examples of where these lines of communication become beneficial include:

- Partnership in the identification and recruitment of new officials and then a collaborative effort to set them up for success.
- Ownership and partnership in initiatives designed to assist in developing officials in a non-threatening environment such as cross-ice games, mentoring and shadowing.
- Ability to resolve officiating issues in a productive and efficient manner without confrontation or questions of integrity or motivation.
- Respectful dialogue on establishing game fees and establishing a fare fee for the officials while maintaining cost control for the youth hockey organization.
- Consideration of potential officiating systems to be used at various levels to provide the best possible level of officiating while also providing development and advancement opportunities for the officials. This then also gets incorporated to discussions mentioned above.
- Improved perception of officiating in general amongst the membership by recognizing the role officials play in creating a more positive environment for the game.
- Improved quality of local officiating when both parties are working together to address issues pertaining to abuse, enforcement standards and fair play.
- An overall better atmosphere and more positive environment is created if the quality of officiating is better and each group has a vested interest in the success of the game.

WHAT EXPECTATIONS SHOULD A YOUTH HOCKEY ASSOCIATION HAVE IN REGARDS TO THE LOCAL GROUP OF OFFICIALS?

There are a variety of things that a local youth hockey organization can and should expect from the officials that work their games. However, these expectations are based on the youth hockey organization being connected with the officials and supporting them through a partnership and direct lines of communications. There has to be a vested interest in all aspects of the game, from coaching to officiating and everything in between and it is not as simple as picking and choosing those areas where they want to be involved.

The areas where a local youth hockey organization should have awareness of and work together with the officials are listed below. Both Officials and Youth organizations have to be aware of the environment, encourage change when it may be deemed necessary and work together to obtain the necessary resources and information to be successful.

RECOMMENDATIONS

USA Hockey's Officiating Sub-Committee on Local Organization relationships makes the following recommendations to assist local hockey areas in creating the positive environment desired:

Local Youth Hockey Associations

- Each local youth hockey organization identifies an Officiating Liaison who serves as the conduit for communication between the officials and the youth hockey leaders. This person may or may not have an officiating background, but ultimately is in place to improve relationships and connect the two groups together on issues of mutual interest.
- The Local Youth Hockey organization should support and encourage the Officiating Initiatives and expectations outlined above. This will require some minor sacrifice and investment on the part of the local youth hockey organization.
- Each entity should work together to develop an agreed upon mechanism/procedure to properly address officiating/coaching concerns.
- With the creation of the Officiating Liaison position, strong lines of communication should be established that fosters accountability of both groups.
- The leadership of each entity should work together to develop an interest and commitment from all leaders to be involved in the promotion of officiating and hockey excellence.
- The leaders of both entities forge a partnership that is designed to create a positive hockey environment for all. This includes curriculum at Coaching Clinics and Officiating Seminars that promotes working together for the best interest of the game.

Local Officiating Groups

- The local group of officials identifies an individual to serve as a Liaison who serves as the conduit for communication between the officials and the youth hockey leaders. This person would work closely with the local youth hockey recommended Liaison on issues of mutual interest.
- The officials' assignor follows the USA Hockey Officiating Assignment Guidelines
- The official's group follows the recommended USA Hockey officiating system guidelines.
- The local group of officials works with the youth hockey organization to take advantage of cross-ice officiating opportunities and also the lower levels of play for shadowing and mentor programs.
- The local group of officials establishes an USA Hockey Officials Evaluation Program for all levels of play.
- The local group of officials actively recruits, accepts and encourages new officials. This is imperative to maintaining and growing the pool of experienced officials.
- The local group of officials provides ongoing education for officials, parents and coaches with regular meetings, additional seminars and/or ice sessions.
- The local group of officials provides opportunities for advancement and development of officials. Officials should be encouraged to take pride in their skills and be the best they can possibly be.
- The local officials are expected to strongly enforce the USA Hockey "Points of Emphasis" and Standard of Play initiatives.
- The local officials are expected to follow the USA Hockey officiating procedures and guidelines as outlined at the seminars and in the education materials.
- The local officials make a commitment for the betterment of the game while taking a vested interest in the success of the local program in creating the best possible environment for growth and fun.

SUMMARY / RESOURCES

The strength of any local hockey program will only be as strong as their volunteer leadership and the game cannot develop within a local area without officiating being at a competent level. These volunteer leaders must work together and have a vested interest in the success of all aspects of the game while encouraging ownership by each facet within their respective area – i.e. coaching, officiating, etc. USA Hockey has created a vast library of resource materials that allow for the implementation of a successful local officiating program that includes a strong working relationship with local youth hockey organizations that promotes the best possible environment for all participants.

A complete listing of all resource materials are found below and can be downloaded from the Officiating Page of USAHockey.com.

USA Hockey Playing Rules Publications:

2017-21 Official Rules of Ice Hockey
2017-21 Playing Rules & Casebook
2017-21 Playing Rules & Casebook Mobile App
Serving Major Penalties Guidelines
Goalkeeper Equipment Measurement Guidelines
USA Hockey-Hockey Canada Rule & Equipment Agreement
2017-21 Junior Rulebook
Sled Hockey Playing Rules
USA Hockey Body Checking Standard of Play
USA Hockey Restraining Fouls Standard of Play
USAH/NFHS/NCAA Three Rule Comparison
Goalkeeper Equipment Measurement Guidelines

USA Hockey Local Officiating Association Publications:

Local Association Handbook
Assignor Handbook
Mentor Program Handbook
Off-Ice Officiating Manual
Officiating Systems Guidelines
USA Hockey Local Youth Association/Officials Group Relationship

USA Hockey Officiating Manuals:

Basic Officiating Manual
Intermediate Officiating Manual
Advanced Officiating Manual
Four-Official System Manual
Red, White, & Blue (Cross-Ice) Officiating Manual

USA Hockey Officiating Videos

USA Hockey Standard of Play I
USA Hockey Standard of Play II
USA Hockey Penalty Guidelines
USA Hockey Body Contact in Non-checking Classifications