

Help the SMHA grow ? sign up to become a referee

Dear editor:

Over the past few weeks there has been a lot of discussion in terms of the issues that are happening within the Minor Hockey Association in terms of behaviour inside our local arena. I have been an advocate on trying to change the ways for years and I am finally felling like the time is right for people getting on board with trying to make changes. After reading the most recent articles regarding concerns, I felt it was necessary to weigh in on the situation.

In writing this letter I hope to show people a different perspective of the situation. I have spent the last 17 years refereeing hockey many of those in Shelburne, I have also spent the last 4 seasons being the area OMHA Supervisor. I have watched and been part of hundreds of games in that time frame. I hear a lot of complaints in terms of referees and it is a never ending battle trying to get everyone involved on the same page.

I wish I could say every hockey game was the same, and that every referee made the perfect call every time, but that just isn't reality. Being a referee is a difficult job and very few people are good at it. The Rule book is lengthy full of hundreds of rules, scenarios and incidents but it can't cover them all. Reading the book isn't the only answer, you need to be able to skate fast enough to keep up to the game, and you need to make split second decisions and many times with a limited view of what happened. Every referee goes through the same training at the beginning of every year, but it takes time and experience to get comfortable. Every single game I go out to watch or be part of the referees are doing nothing but trying their absolute hardest to make that game go smoothly. I hear many mixed messages from coaches and parents about how they feel about how stuff should be called. I have many discussions who continue stuck in the old ways of, 'let them play?'. Then I have many others who continue to complain about the lack of penalties being called. The fact of the matter is were not in the old ways anymore. 'Let them play' is no longer part of the vocabulary used when teaching our referees. We are now concerned on head contact, concussions, dangerous hit and impact penalties. Many people involved in the minor hockey system are not rehearsed enough with the rules to really be weighing in on what should be called and shouldn't be. It's not like 20 years ago, and to be honest it's not like 5 years ago. Times are changing where hockey in Canada is purely based on skill development and making our players better. Hockey Canada is not concerned with teaching our kids to run players through the boards or hook and hold to slow players down. There is going to be times in every game where certain things happen that calls are going to be in question. But the notion that cursing and swearing at referees is the answer in these times is completely wrong. The referee always tries to make the call he best sees fit. The perspective a parent has from high in the stands away from the players is much different than a referees up close and right in the middle of the fast pace environment.

Over the last few years minor hockey has seen an overwhelming number in the loss of officials across Ontario. Dufferin County is no different. Virtually every area is short referees and it will continue to be a problem unless something drastically changes. Many younger kids sign up for a season or two and quit soon after. Almost all of them state the pressure from parents and coaches the main reason why. The thing is it's not just the kids. Many seasoned and experienced officials are packing it in also for the same reasons. Many people think that it's okay to treat referees with no respect as they get paid to it and they so called signed up for it. Again, these opinions are ludicrous. Many of these officials spend hundreds of dollars at the beginning of every season to get started. In terms of registration costs, equipment, gas etc. It is generally months into the season before some officials have made the money back that they have invested into the Program. Many other centres are struggling just to find referees to allow games to continue and Shelburne is quickly approaching the same issue. Already in town, we are forced to use the same referees night after night due to the lack of qualified officials and it is causing even more stress on the situation. But the reality is, if these people don't do the game then who will? There isn't a long list of people waiting to sign up to be a referee in Shelburne but I would love to start taking names and numbers of people in the community willing to give it a try.

It's a job that nobody wants, but someone has to do it or our kids won't be able to play! The least that can be expected from our players, coaches and parents is some mutual respect and how difficult the job can be. We need to end the belief that it's the Shelburne Referees vs Shelburne Teams. We are all in it together, we all want to see the SMHA grow and get better. Every single one of the Referees in Shelburne are part of our Community. They have grown up here, work here and have kids playing here. I hope that with the recent articles and The ongoing discussions with members of our community, minor hockey executive and people

like me committed to trying to make a difference we can continue to find a solution to resolve the issues happening in our arena.

Chris Reed

OMHA Supervisor