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Minor hockey struggling to retain referees]

Written By **Brian Lockhart**

At the end of the day, it's just a game.

Hockey won't take place without qualified referees controlling the game.

Unfortunately, sometimes the fun of playing the game is replaced by a ?win at all costs' attitude, and when it takes that direction, the first people who brunt that excitement are the referees.

Most OMHA officials referee because they love the game of hockey and want to give back to the community that provided them with the opportunity to play the game they grew up playing when they were kids.

There has been a trend in recent years that has seen a number of younger officials not wanting to return to the OMHA officiating program. No matter what division they ref in, many officials feel they are being treated in a completely unacceptable manner by fans, coaches, and players.

Officials make mistakes on the ice, and how people respond to this makes a huge difference to a referee's performance and willingness to keep working as a referee.

Many situations could be easily avoided if people just stopped and thought about their actions and behaviour, especially when directed at young officials. The hockey world needs these young officials because they will eventually become veteran referees in the big games.

The OMHA sees hundreds of new 14- and 15-year-old boys and girls attending their referee schools and clinics yearly.

After starting officiating, many decide not to return, and with good reason. What 14-year-old wants to officiate a 7:00 a.m. game in the middle of winter only to be screamed at because they missed atripping penalty?

The OMHA officiating program wants to see all officials return to the game. The OMHA tries to teach officials how to deal with and manage the conflict they encounter while improving themselves as officials.

Coaches, players, and fans have to remember that officials are an integral part of the game, and before yelling and screaming at them, take a deep breath and remember that it is just a game.