

March 31, 2014

All...

The season is reaching its final stages over the next 10 days as the HS Silver State Championship and HS Nationals take place this weekend and Tier Youth Nationals take place the first weekend in April. The South Division of the NA3HL has a Texas representative at the Silver Cup tournament this weekend and the TEAM TEXAS HS Allstars will be in Pittsburgh for the Americas Showcase April 9-14.

Congratulations to the Stars Elite program for capturing Tier I State titles at the 14U, 16U and 18U age levels. And congrats to Plano West for their HS Gold State title and advancing to the semi- finals of the national tournament. Also congrats to Grapevine/Colleyville for capturing the Varsity Silver State Championship. And we wish HC Dallas (18U) and DJHA (16U and 14U) the best of luck at the Tier II Nationals after capturing the respective State Championships. We are pleased to have been able to secure a second spot at Tier II Nationals at 14U and HC Dallas will be playing in that spot.

And even as we prepare to complete one season, plans for the new season are already underway. So there are a few updates that we need to pass along to you.

TIER I DESIGNATION

TAHA has examined the two current Tier I organizations and we have elected to exercise our renewal option for the 2014/2015 season for both Clubs at the 18U and 16U divisions. The continued streamlining of Tier I/AAA that occurred last season had a profoundly positive effect on our competitiveness nationally and we continue to believe that for now, two is the appropriate number of Tier I organizations for our Affiliate and that the Elite and HC Dallas are the two Clubs best suited to operate and deliver Tier I. There are changes to our Tier I rules that you need to know about.

First, we have modified the portion of the Tier I rules that prohibits more than one Tier I team at an age group. Consistent with the direction Tier I is taking nationwide, we are granting both Tier I clubs the option of icing a 15U Tier I team for the 2014/2015 season. It is not a requirement to offer 15U Tier I but the option is now available.

Second, 15U Tier I teams will compete in the State tournament each year.

In addition, we have analyzed the projected player pool at 14U for next season and have serious concerns that the Affiliate can legitimately ice two competitive 14U Tier I teams next season. Considering the significant costs associated with Tier I, we have no desire to see one 14U team be competitive nationally while the other struggles to find appropriately skilled players. As a result, at the 14U age level we are evaluating options related to 14U Tier I and will make a final decision shortly regarding the number of teams we will authorize.

As we approach the application process next Spring we will reevaluate all of Tier I including the number of organizations and teams at each age level.

HOUSE/REC MODIFICATION

Over the past few years USA Hockey has moved away from labels like AAA, AA, A, or B, etc., in defining a team's "level" of play. This was done to reflect the lessened focus on winning and championships and to place greater emphasis on player development and enjoyment of the game. Instead, USAH now uses three designations in choosing the type of roster to use:

1. Tier I (national bound)
2. Tier II (national bound)
3. House/Rec (in-house teams)

TAHA currently has rules governing roster eligibility for Tier I teams/organizations and for Tier II teams. These rules and requirements can be found in the TAHA Guidebook. House/Rec was originally intended to serve as a means to roster players and teams competing on "in house" hockey programs and little thought was given to placing any restrictions or requirements for teams using this type of roster. Even today, some 70%-80% of teams using a house/rec roster are teams comprised of non-tier level players competing in in-house or local/city travel leagues.

In recent years and with the advent of tighter restrictions on Tier designations, some organizations and teams have taken advantage of house/rec rosters to create a "workaround" to being designated Tier I. In some locations house/rec teams are recruited from across the country in an attempt to assemble Tier I caliber teams that compete in "AAA" tournaments without having earned that designation or following the same rules as legitimate Tier I teams. In short, these "nationally recruited" house/rec teams draw Tier I and II players away from true Tier teams and fracture the competitive pyramid that USA Hockey strives to make available.

Effective June 1st, 2014, House/Rec rosters will be subject to eligibility rules that prohibit "recruiting" of players from outside the community and our Affiliate. The full rule will be incorporated in the next revision of the TAHA Guidebook in June. But take note of these House/Rec eligibility rules:

- All players on House/Rec rosters must be from the local community where the home rink is located.
- As with Tier II eligibility, "community" in major markets is considered the entire area (i.e., Houston is a community, DFW is a community)
- Players must be from the TAHA Affiliate with the family's domicile or permanent residence in the community where the home rink is located.
- No out of Affiliate players will be allowed on House/Rec rosters.
- Billeting will not be permitted for players listed on a House/Rec roster.

Limited exceptions in the form of waivers will be permitted if an Affiliate player's primary residence is in a community that does not have a House/Rec team in the appropriate age division. The same waiver process that is used for Tier II waivers will be followed.

House/Rec rosters may be used for tournament teams during the season (August to April) with approval from the House Section President.

MITES

There is one significant change to the TAHA Mite Policy for the coming year. Beginning June 1, 2014 all Mite teams and leagues will be fully ADM compliant and there will be **no full ice games permitted**. The evidence and data continues to mount regarding the disservice that full ice games delivers to our youngest players. After considerable discussion with coaches and players at every level of play, the TAHA Board has concluded that continuing to offer even a small number of full ice games

for Mites was more an appeasement tactic rather than a decision geared to the best interests of our players. We strongly encourage rink operators to take full advantage of the grant monies from TAHA that can help acquire the hard dividers. These boards go a long way toward delivering "the look and feel" of real hockey.

A reminder to all clubs that Mite aged players MAY NOT participate in Spring camps and clinics unless those clinics are 100% ADM compliant. Mite aged players may tryout for Squirt teams but only two play ups are permitted and those two Mite play ups MUST be rostered on the "highest level" Squirt team you offer.

OUTSTANDING DEBT LIST (ODL)

It is that time of year again that we begin closing out one season in preparation for the next. We know that that can be challenging when amounts are still owed. TAHA manages the ODL to ensure that players complete their financial obligations before moving to a different hockey club for the next season. If players owe money for the 13/14 season you should add that player to the ODL. The deadline for players to be added for the season just ending is **Tuesday, April 8th at 5:00 PM** Central time. We will NOT add players to the list for this past season after that time.

The ODL is maintained in a secure space on the TAHA web site and only approved members may access it. The form and all instructions on how to add a delinquent player to the list can be found on the ODL page.

TRYOUTS

The Affiliate-wide tryout schedule has been posted to the TAHA web site. The dates reflect the changes to Tier I (15U). Please review and make sure you follow the appropriate dates for your age and levels. A reminder that organizations using the Tier II tryout window will be required to apply for the State Tournament.

GRANTS

Continuing our commitment to the ADM concept and being more intelligent with the development of our youngest players, TAHA has issued four grants for hard dividers to various rinks, as well as provided matching funds grants for goalie gear to two programs. We still do have some funds available that can be used for dividers and equipment so if your building is interested then we are wanting you to strongly consider taking full advantage of the financial support the Affiliate is offering. It is our goal to see hard dividers in EVERY building and our rinks continuing to provide a superior development process to every young player.

UPDATE MEMBER INFORMATION

We are missing information on some Member Associations and need your help in updating information about your organization. Please provide us by April 15 the name, mailing address, phone number and email address for:

- Association President
- Association Registrar
- Association TAHA Representative

SAFESPORT

In recent weeks we have had several reminders about why the SafeSport policy is so important to all of us. Each of our Members should have a trained SafeSport Coordinator who has the primary task of ensuring an appropriate level of understanding for all coaches and administrators. A critical part of the policy is also the need to conduct training and education for players, particularly at the older age groups.

ICE JETS UPDATE

In February TAHA participated in an Arbitration hearing regarding the non-renewal of the Ice Jets Member Agreement. Arbitration was the final step in the lengthy dispute resolution process afforded by USA Hockey Bylaw 10. As was the case in the hearing conducted late last summer, the Arbitration panel ruled in TAHA's favor and concluded that "the Ice Jets failed to prove by clear and convincing evidence that there was an abuse of discretion by TAHA or that TAHA acted in an arbitrary and capricious manner."

KEY DATES IN 2014

Please mark your calendars for several important events coming in the next several months.

April 2-6	Tier I Nationals	Green Bay, WI
April 2-6	Tier II 14U Nationals	Hackensack, NJ
April 2-6	Tier II 16U Nationals	Reston, VA
April 2-6	Tier II 18U Nationals	Wayne, NJ
April 10-14	Americas Showcase (High School)	Pittsburgh, PA
April 10 and 12	NCAA Division I Semis and Finals	Philadelphia, PA
June 14-19	Boys 14U Select Camp	Colorado Springs, CO

FINALLY

As you are all aware we are engaged in aggressive efforts to grow our game nationally and in our Affiliate. There are many initiatives underway that are all geared toward making our sport accessible and affordable to potential new players. Our rink members are being asked to carry the lion's share of the burden to get new players in the door, but in the end it is up to all of us to do our part. If you are a travel club it is essential that you make your coaches and volunteers available to the rinks during hockey exposure events to assist with registrations and on ice activities. We have made great progress this year already in terms of our numbers and it will continue to require a concerted and collaborative effort to attract more players to this great sport.

As always, please do not forget the men and women of our military who ensure the safety of our nation.

Thank you to the many volunteers who make this game so incredibly special.

Reggie