

President's Message...

This has been an eventful year. Just over 15 months ago I was asked to consider running for the TAHA Board, a move I am convinced was intended to shut me up and force me to put my money where my mouth was.

Now just 15 months later I find myself chosen to step into the role of President of the Affiliate. Ted Skinner and TC Lewis definitely set the bar high with their guidance and vision and I have my work cut out for me to come close to the accomplishments both of them delivered while TAHA President. But with the help of a great Board and the many volunteers that want to expand and improve our game, I am optimistic about what we can accomplish.

So what are the goals for the year ahead?

COSTS

The biggest challenge facing the youth game today is the high cost of entry into our sport. Potential new players are frightened away by the costs and many of our current families are finding it increasingly difficult to stay in the sport. We have to recognize that our competition isn't the hockey association in the next rink; it is all the other sports and leisure activities. It is far too easy for families to choose baseball or football or almost any other sport because of the cost commitment we are asking them to make.

In the next few weeks we intend to announce a task force that will concentrate on steps we can take to bring costs down. This won't be easy as there are many stakeholders here but it is incumbent on all of us to realize that we are on a diminishing return trajectory. We will eventually run out of players if we don't bring the costs down and get more kids playing. This task force will need to include rink operators, coaches and travel associations representing all areas of the Affiliate. Volunteers are requested to email with your willingness to participate.

GROW THE GAME

While this is a USA Hockey initiative, I believe we have to embrace this as our goal. Survival of our sport depends on expanding the number of kids playing hockey across the Affiliate. This begins in the rinks and with house hockey but in the end this has to be the charge of every rink, association and coach in the Affiliate. Travel teams are set now for the most part, but the rinks and house leagues will be running Hockey 101 and beginner leagues all season long. To be successful, every Board member, administrator, coach and parent should work to get one or two new kids to the rink this season. Once you get them there...they will stay if we can make it affordable.

There are some innovative programs being developed here and in other locations that involve school demonstrations, player recruiting drives, and introduction to hockey programs that should be routine in every community. (If you are a teacher, school administrator or sit on a school board, PLEASE volunteer and help us get our message into the elementary and middle schools.) If the rinks need support to staff these programs then the Travel Associations should be ready to provide people and financial resources. The same is true for TAHA.

We are reaching out to further connect our efforts at the youth level with the NHL, AHL and CHL franchises in the Affiliate to get their support and involvement in expanding the game.

We are working now to identify a “Grow the Game” task force to develop a gameplan for getting into the schools and working with the rinks to get new kids on the ice. We have some money set aside for grants, as well as sets of the ONEGOAL equipment for beginners. If you have ideas or want to participate on this task force please contact a TAHA Board member to get your name in the hat.

FOCUS ON THE GAME

TAHA has been forced to focus on a wide range of administrative, process and legal issues of late that caused our collective eye to be taken off some of our stated goals. Rules and procedures are critical to ensure fair and equitable management of the sport and some degree of administrivia is unavoidable. But we have spent entirely too much energy and Affiliate money on administration of the game when that money could have, and should have been spent on growing the game. This will have to end now.

As we look to the future, our focus will be on player development and opportunities for growth for our athletes. We want Member organizations that embrace the growth of the sport and understand the critical need for collaboration and partnership.

We have some great organizations, state of the art facilities, and incredible training in this Affiliate and using these advantages to promote our sport and our athletes has to be....and will be....our focus going forward.

We have a great foundation on which to grow our game and I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. Thank you for your efforts and the commitment to this great sport.

Volunteer early and often.

Reggie