



President's Message

September 17, 2014

The new season is underway and with it comes the promise of new challenges, new learnings and for many; new teams and teammates. The first few weeks of practice for travel is in the books and the initial tournament is behind us. High School and House hockey are just getting underway. Many of the rinks are just winding down one Adult hockey season and preparing for the next one.

Now we settle in for the fun that is "HOCKEY".

Based on all reports we have seen, this spring and summer were smooth and while there are a few less teams taking the ice this fall, the rosters of the teams that are suiting up appear to be more complete and stable. And while "contraction" is a word that keeps getting tossed around, in reality we are simply in a phase of correcting the imbalance between the number of teams and players that has challenged our sport for the past few years.

Looking forward the future looks to be in good shape. We grew right around 1,000 players last season and the focus from the rinks on attracting new players has never been greater. We continue to provide grant monies to our rink and Association members to support that growth and as we did last year we have set aside a substantial budget for "Grow the Game" activities. (Although we will be dealing with the residue of the ongoing Polar Ice lawsuit for the next 10 months or so, we are working to ensure there will be grant money available throughout the season.)

Under the leadership of Ted Skinner, TAHA blazed the trail by embracing cross/half ice hockey for our youngest players some five years ago. Today, TAHA is the model that many other Affiliates are copying. Each day, more and more NHL and collegiate coaches and players endorse the ADM teaching concepts and the commitment to right size the rink for our youngest players. Over the summer TAHA hosted three or four ADM clinics put on by USA Hockey and the attendance and acceptance was exceptional. Thank you to all the rinks that have and continue to support ADM and the Mite cross/half ice game.

As always, there are a number of housekeeping items that need to be addressed so please, review these items closely.

Background Checks

Perhaps no topic garnered as much discussion over the summer and at the Registrar meetings as the background checks. We shared at the Annual Meeting that the changes in the SafeSport requirements and the inconsistencies in the breadth of the checks being conducted pretty much demanded an overhaul in our procedures. We spent several weeks

sorting through proposals and considering various approaches and have made the final selection of vendor and process.

Effective October 1, all new background checks will be conducted through NCSI. There are **NO** exceptions. Individuals needing a background check will access NCSI through a link on the TAHA web site (www.tahahockey.org).

All participants will be required to undergo a new background check prior to the start of the 2015/16 season and every two years thereafter.

The cost of background checks will be \$25 (standard search, \$75 international) and payment will be made directly to NCSI via credit card online. (This charge includes an automatic "recheck" after one year – so essentially this provides two background checks.) If your rink or Association chooses to pick up the cost, you may obtain a code from NCSI that your coaches and staff can plug into the online form and costs will be billed directly to your credit card.

Each Member Rink, Club or Association is required to provide to TAHA the following information **BY 9/27**:

- Legal Name of Member Association
- President
- Contact person for Background Checks
- Contact Email, Cell,
- Address for Member Association
- Designate whether your organization will require individuals to pay or payment will be made by the rink/association, or both.

Required information should be emailed to Don Girard (dongirard@tahahockey.org)

If the member Rink, Club or Association is intending to pay, we will secure a credit card number and NCSI will provide a unique "code" that your users will input so billing can occur.

Once background checks have been completed, the results will be sent to TAHA and the organization (rink or Association) for review. Any "red light" or questionable report will be flagged for discussion.

To help eliminate some confusion on background checks, let me share that **ANY** red light related to sexual or physical abuse will result in immediate removal of that individual from any contact with players until a review of the report has occurred. That review will include

TAHA, USA Hockey and the requesting rink or Association. **Final determination will be made by TAHA on any red light report related to sexual or physical abuse.**

Any red light report for other activities, DUI, theft, etc., should be reviewed with consideration given to how long ago the event occurred, the age at the time of the event and other factors that may have contributed to the event. For example a 35 year old coach that was arrested at 16 for shoplifting, versus a 35 year old coach arrested last year for DUI might result in very different decisions.

But in the end, these decisions rest with the rink or Association employing the coach, Team Manager or other volunteer. Rinks and Associations will make the decisions on non-sexual/physical abuse red lights based on your assessment of the circumstances. TAHA will be available to consult on these matters but in the end, the decisions are yours.

Officials

Effective immediately, no official (age 18 or older) is permitted to work ANY USA Hockey sanctioned contest unless that official has a current background check completed. In our major markets there are associations that oversee scheduling and it will be your responsibility to ensure that all officials on your roster are legal to work with current background checks.

In those geographies where there are no Associations, it will become the rink or other schedulers duty to ensure that you do not schedule officials that you cannot verify have a background check that is current and in good standing.

We also know that even in major markets there are officials being scheduled directly. Bottom line is if you schedule officials, you are required to ensure they have current background checks.

Community-Based Rules

Another major topic of conversation this spring was the application of the Community-based eligibility rules. The rules governing Tier II eligibility have not been altered and can be found in the TAHA Guidebook on the TAHA web site. The change made to House/Rec eligibility was communicated several times and will be added to the new version of the Guidebook. But for the most part, eligibility for House/Rec teams now mirrors the Tier II eligibility rules.

In short, for any level other than Tier I, players must be residents of the local community in order to play in that community. Residency means the family's "primary household" is in that community.

Being registered in school is not sufficient.

Renting an apartment in and of itself is not enough.

Transferring guardianship to someone in a community does not equate to having residency.

Primary household is where the entire family lives. It is the address you use for tax purposes. If there is ANY question about any player on your rosters, it would be a good idea to run it by TAHA now rather than later when someone else questions it.

Progressive Penalty Rule

Just a reminder that the progressive penalty rule (Rule 411) is in effect. Players who receive their 3rd Major penalty for any of the “aggressive” fouls (See USAH web site: <http://www.usahockeyrulebook.com/page/show/1084489-rule-411-progressive-suspensions>) will receive a three game suspension that cuts across all teams that player is rostered on.

There is also a separate progressive discipline rule that covers fighting.

Make sure your coaches and Team Managers understand how these suspensions work.

High School

Another big change for us this year is in the High School structure. As I mentioned at the Annual Meeting, USA Hockey has now added a second division for Nationals that will see both Pure and Blended team champions crowned.

This change necessitated a restructuring of the State Tournament which TAHA will now oversee. Our State tournament will take place the weekend of February 6 in Dallas. Four teams will compete in each of the two divisions, resulting in the crowning of both a Pure and Blended state champion.

Shortly all HS teams will receive information on how to apply for the HS state tournament and the procedures that will govern how playdowns (if necessary) will occur. In general, the application and playdown procedures will mirror what is done for Tier II.

Perhaps the biggest change for HS will come in player eligibility. An FAQ is being prepared for the HS programs and should be out later this week, but in general, players must play for the school/district where they live. If a player does not have a school/district team where he/she lives, the player can go through a tryout and be assigned to a team based on geography and team need. Any player that does NOT participate in the league-wide tryout cannot be assigned to any team without TAHA approval.

Players who have a team in their home district must play for that team with limited exceptions. Any such exceptions must be approved by TAHA in a waiver process that will be explained shortly.

Waivers are granted only for a period of one year and must be reapplied for each year. Merely playing for a team in one season does NOT grandfather you to that team for your career.

A player that is deemed ineligible will not be allowed to participate in the State or National Tournaments.

USA Hockey Registration

Now that the new season is starting up all players, coaches and volunteers are required to have 2015 USA Hockey registration numbers. There should be no player or coach that is not properly registered on the ice or on the bench. Failing to complete this due diligence represents a significant liability for your organization. Allowing a non-registered player or coach to step on the ice or behind the bench could potentially result in the contest being deemed "non-sanctioned" by USAH and/or TAHA.

An injury or serious infraction that involves a player not properly registered could produce significant legal and financial implications.

Finally

As we look forward we have many reasons to be optimistic. The current litigation with Polar Ice notwithstanding, we are finally able as an Affiliate to focus the majority of our attention on enhancing our game, growing our sport and creating a fun and exciting atmosphere for our players to enjoy.

We are constantly seeking volunteers and would love to hear from you if you want to be more involved.

Thanks for all you do.

Have a great season!

Reggie Hall