

Dear Minor Hockey Presidents,

Below is a message we hope will reach all coaches in all associations. As the South Island Minor Officiating Lead, I have worked with Chris Canuel, my North Island counterpart, and your Referee-In-Chiefs across the Island to communicate the dire situation we find ourselves in. Our goal is to provide some visibility into the current officiating situation, and to bring the coaching and officiating worlds together towards a common understanding on the struggles the officiating programs at each MHA are dealing with.

A coach's enthusiasm or apathy towards officiating can dramatically affect the pool of available officials, which can either result in less capable officials on the ice and a diminished hockey experience for everyone, or it can provide your games with more capable officials, which we can agree makes for a better hockey experience.

I've added some personal anecdotes because officials are people with their own journey through the hockey world, not just the referee on the ice.

Please consider asking your RIC's if there is something your executive can do to improve your MHA's officiating program. Officials do not get much practice time so on-ice development time for officials would be a big step if it's not already provided.

Dear Vancouver Island U13, U15, and U18 Coaches,

This season has started with extraordinary enthusiasm for the sport we have been deprived of for the past 18 months.

However, the number of certified officials today is dramatically lower than 2 short years ago. A large number of officials have not yet decided to officiate due to the pandemic and only some are going to come back, which creates an even smaller group that has certified already and gotten back on the ice. We can speculate on what factors have put us with this deficit of officials but more importantly, the question becomes; Where do we go from here?

We currently have an increase in demand for officials with weekends full of exhibition and tiering games, with a severe shortage of supply. We are used to managing a lack of experience or a lack of quantity, but to be frank, this season we have both. The officials we do have are doing an excellent job on and off the ice to allow the officiating leadership (RIC's and Allocators) to continue to provide you, the coaches and players, a fair and safe hockey experience.

The procedure teams may have become familiar with is Rule 5.2 (k) in the [Hockey Canada Rule Book](#), this will become a more common occurrence as the season goes on, and MHA's should be prepared and stash a spare jersey(s) and whistles in the ref rooms for these situations. Here is the content from Rule 5.2 (k) as of the 2020-2022 rule book edition.

“5.2k) If for whatever reason, the Referee(s) or Linesperson(s) appointed are prevented from appearing, the Managers or Coaches of the two competing clubs shall agree on the Referee(s) and Linesperson(s). If they are unable to agree, they shall appoint a player from each team who shall act as officials. “

This email is being distributed to establish an understanding between the coaches and the officials on how Vancouver Island Minor Hockey can recover, grow, and eventually thrive.

To start; If there are no officials, there are no games, and most officials are also players. On a personal note, I primarily officiate now, but when I was 5 years old I was playing 'Little Gretzky's', then I certified to be an official at 12 while playing Peewee T3 as something to do on the side. After juggling both for a few years, I decided the most enjoyable way for me to experience hockey was to be an on-ice official.

Being a member of the hockey community is more than just being a player, you all know this because you are coaches. Without coaches, there is no hockey; without managers, there is no hockey; without officials, there is no hockey. This is a plea to see officials standing side-by-side

WITH coaches, not in opposition. With a common goal of providing the best hockey experience for the most kids as possible. Even though there will continue to be times we disagree on the calls to make, and that's ok.

There are four (4) outcomes we hope to achieve:

1. Share this information with your players and parents encouraging them to start officiating. It will provide them more ice time to work on their skating skills as well as enhance their understanding of the rules of the game.
2. Allow your players to make their own choices between playing engagements, and officiating assignments. If you expect officials for your games, they need to come from somewhere.
3. Take a moment to consider the official on the ice for your game, as the person that they are. It might be their first game at that level because there was no one else that could officiate the game. It might be their 5th or 6th game of the weekend. They might have cancelled dinner or plans with friends and family to officiate your game, to allow your players to play. These used to be rare occurrences, so far this year, they are happening every weekend, at every association.
4. Watch BC Hockey's [Video](#) on the New *Maltreatment* section of the rulebook and recognize the strong emphasis Hockey Canada is putting on treating all participants of the game with respect. Do not be surprised when officials penalize unsportsmanlike conduct, from anyone and directed towards anyone. The biggest loss of officials has been the verbal abuse they receive from coaches, players, and spectators. Furthermore, we are learning more and more about the impacts of Maltreatment in the game for all participants, whether it be bullying, verbal, physical or sexual abuse. These behaviours or environments that have allowed such maltreatment to exist have negatively impacted people in our game but we have a chance to make the arena a safe, welcoming, inclusive and positive place to be. One of the mottos for several decades within the officiating program has been to 'Treat disrespect with respect', this approach has changed this year, the direction from Hockey Canada is to now 'Treat disrespect with the appropriate penalties'.

Inaction on this issue is not an option given our current climate. If people choose to disregard officiating as important, then we will have less officials, and games will lack the necessary officiating. Coaches who encourage officiating will be providing our next generation of players with a better hockey experience. The bare minimum we can do is to treat the officials we do

have with more respect than we have in the past, so that we can at least retain what we have and ideally encourage new people to give it a try.

The benefits of becoming an official:

- You get more immersed in the game, and a gain better understandings of the rules
- You get more skating practice and exercise
- You can set your own schedule
- You gain resume skills: Professional conduct, handling tough situations in real-time, applying rules and procedures in dynamic environments
- You earn some cash
- You are giving back to the game, now and in the future, most players will not make the NHL, but you will be able to officiate well after you finish playing to stay involved in the game. I have been lucky enough to officiate much better hockey that I could have ever played

Steps to becoming a certified official:

- Be 12 years of age on or before Dec 31st, 2021
- Email your MHA's Referee-In-Chief (Contact list below)...
 - ... for information specific for your MHA
 - ... so you can be added to the contact list/assigning system.
 - ... to find out when your local MHA is hosting it's in-person clinic
- BC Hockey's instructions <https://www.bchockey.net/Officiating/GettingStarted.aspx>.
** For most it will include:
 - A self-directed online course with the basics: [Hockey University Officiating 1/2](#)
 - An in-person clinic with your peers to discuss the rest

There is a training course for officials as young as 10 years old (as of Dec 31st, 2021), to officiate U9 cross ice, reach out to your RIC if you are interested in this option. There is an upfront cost to the certification process, but most MHAs reimburse those costs as the official works games and contributes to their organization.

We are asking for you to take a step toward improving the hockey experience for everyone.

Yours in hockey,

*On behalf of VIAHA Referee-in-Chiefs,
Jason Syrotuck
South Island Minor Officiating Lead*

VIAHA Referee-in-Chief Contact List

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