

CLUB CHAIRS MEETING

Report of meeting on 4th February 2007

Present: Bob Wilkinson, Neville Moralee, Geoff Hemmerman, Rob Laidler, Valerie Wilkinson, Jacqueline Pye, Rita Mackriell, Allison Taylor, Carol-Ann Watt, Steve Taylor, Alan Moutrey, Liz Moralee, Charles Dacres, Allan Batchelder, Ken Riddell, Basingstoke, Bracknell, Bradford, Chelmsford, Coventry, Guildford, Haringey, Isle of Wight, Kingston, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Newcastle, Nottingham, Oxford, Peterborough, Romford, Sheffield, Streatham, Sutton in Ashfield, Swindon, Telford.

Apologies: Pauline Rost, Mohammed Ashraff, Malcolm Preen, Billingham, Invicta.

BW thanked everyone for coming, and said this is a chance for all clubs to have a say, on any junior hockey issues they choose. It has been approximately twelve years since there was a meeting like this. He was not yet sure whether holding such a meeting was a good idea, since several clubs had not been in touch, which implied they did not think it necessary.

FIXTURES

Fixtures are a nightmare, especially in the South. Not all clubs have been given their ice slots at the start of the season. There are more fixtures every season, without corresponding increases in ice time. Everyone realises that clubs usually have little or no choice of ice slots. Junior hockey has had to adapt to rinks having a far more commercial focus than they used to. *Dancing On Ice* currently means even less time for hockey. Often games start late. Sometimes the rink manager tells the referee to get the game over with quickly, as he has a fixed time when he will turn off the lights. Some think the EIHA should try to put pressure on rinks over ice time. Lots of fixtures have been changed. Sometimes this was because fixtures did not correspond with ice slots. Clubs have been deciding on fixture changes among themselves; some think if both teams agree on a fixture change then the fixture secretary should automatically accept it.

There have been problems over late face-off times at Nottingham. Nottingham said they are far from happy about it, but have no choice in the times. The situation was made more difficult by the rule about games facing off by 7 p.m. not coming out until late July. It was the officials who insisted on bringing in this rule, because one of the biggest issues at their camps was driving home late at night, especially with work the next day. In fact there was already a rule that games should face off by 6.30, but it caused too many problems to be enforced.

There are no limits on midweek face-off times. If there were a good number of local officials at all rinks the problem would be largely solved. There are many games where the officials have come from a long way away but there are local officials watching. Clubs are finding it hard to afford payments to officials. **AB** explained that with allocations consideration is given to a number of factors, including giving young officials a wide range of experience. EIHA officers said clubs generally have little idea of how good a job Mohammed Ashraff does with the allocations, which involve several hundred games every month, or what a huge amount of work he does altogether. If clubs have a problem they can email him, but it is helpful if any correspondence comes through the club, to avoid having him bombarded with emails.

Some players and parents do not want to travel to Nottingham for 7 p.m. face-offs because of the late time the players will get home. This might mean the team does not have enough players to travel. **GH** tries to give the youngest teams Saturday afternoon fixtures, but this is not always possible. He also tries to have two age groups going to the same venue on the same day, so they have the option of sharing a bus. **CD** asked for a common-sense approach; the important thing is to get the players on the ice, so long as they can get home at a reasonable time. Players go on the ice far later than 7 p.m. for training, especially when

playing up. There might be time to sleep before the training. Conference teams are playing games at 11 p.m., with some players reaching home at 2 a.m., then needing to get up at 6 a.m. for a game. Social Services were consulted, but said the decision was up to the parents. **CD** said if a player is clearly overtired or their school work is suffering then their schedule needs to be changed.

Suggestions were made to deal with the late face-off issue:

- A small amount of leeway. For some clubs an extra 15 minutes would make a lot of difference.
- Sliding scale of latest times according to rink circumstances and away team's distance of travel.
- Allow face-offs after 7 where club is having problems over ice time.
- Allow face-offs after 7 where teams are close together.

Late face-offs should be scheduled only if the away team agrees. 9 clubs have junior games on Sunday, and 6 of these would want a 7 p.m. slot. Only in the North is there leeway to put U19 games on Sunday evening instead. Clubs must remember that any solution needs to be acceptable to the parents.

Some of the problems would be solved by dividing the leagues into three instead of two geographical divisions. This is being considered, however many feel that the quality of hockey would greatly deteriorate.

***BW** will phone Mohammed Ashraff on 7th February and email clubs with a decision on latest face-off times by the end of the week.*

(Bob has still not received confirmation from Ash 14/3/07)

RECRUITMENT OF OFFICIALS

Bracknell proposed investing in training people aged 16 – 19 as officials at each club. Some think it would be worth increasing registration fees if it means more and better officials.

AB said if ten people go on a referee course, it is unusual if even two carry on. They are used only in their own age group and below, unless they are unusually talented and confident.

Young officials are often the subject of complaints from clubs, and then many of them give up because they cannot cope with the abuse or get too few games.

- More mentoring might help keep officials in the game.
- Clubs should ask parents not to abuse officials.
- Officials and coaches could use each other's seminars for education.

Some officials have been on courses but have heard nothing further. There are people waiting to go on courses but these are not being arranged. Courses have gone ahead with only two delegates, but they work much better if there are a larger number, as well as being more cost-effective.

*Clubs are to let **AB** know of any group of 6 or more people wanting to do a course, and also if they have ice time available for courses.*

FEEDBACK ON OFFICIALS

Supervisors are watching officials and providing them with feedback. Clubs have been given feedback forms, but are not bothering to send them in. **AB** said feedback needs to be constructive, and should be sent at least 24 hours after the game to give time to cool off.

Feedback forms will be sent round again. Bracknell will contact Mohammed Ashraff about suggestions for providing feedback in a simpler way, including email, private web page or blog, and dedicated phone.

AVAILABILITY OF COACHING COURSES

A lot of people are waiting to go on courses. The 2007 schedule will be issued to clubs shortly. Provisional dates are now available.

MERGED U10 TEAMS

A team made up of players from more than one club had problems entering the U10 League and felt they were not being encouraged. However at the time they did not have correctly numbered shirts or armbands, and they played a game before the players were registered. There is a compromise solution in place for next season: clubs with a small number of U10s will be allowed for one season to merge them with another team, but they will not be allowed to do this again if by the end of the season they have not made satisfactory progress with recruitment. Merged teams from more than two clubs will not be allowed.

DOPING CONTROL

The EIHA have no choice about implementing the WADA Code, as it is worldwide policy for all sports. One club were unhappy that a player was taking medication that is permitted only with a Therapeutic Use Exemption, and the doctor was asking £25 for a letter. *There are hockey people in the medical profession who would provide a letter free of charge.*

U10S

26 games have been forfeited or voided. Much of this is due to lack of players. Clubs are advised to have someone specifically responsible for recruitment and development of U10s. Sutton's jamboree with cross-ice games and skills section was a great success, with 150 players on the ice at a time. They have set up a website www.x-ice.co.uk. They encouraged all clubs to host a cross-ice tournament. Some clubs said they do not have enough ice for this. There have been only 3 cross-ice days in the North this season.

Some of the history of EIHA U10 hockey was explained. It started off as challenge games only. The clubs then voted for a full-ice league. When cross-ice was brought in there were small regional leagues with each club hosting cross-ice days. Whatever the format there have been constant complaints, and it is obvious there is no way of pleasing everyone. Cross-ice hockey is excellent for development (for all players, not just U10s). However it is hard to get parents interested in it. It gives the chance to mix teams up where numbers are uneven. Most think this can be good for the players, depending on standards, but not all organisers wish to do this. Having challenges only would mean there would be no need to bother about rules on length of shifts. The league gives players something to aim for. It has been a major incentive to some clubs, and these would suffer if it were dropped. However some clubs believe a league cannot work satisfactorily because clubs differ too much in ability and coaching. Small regional leagues mean less travel and expense, but players are bored with too little variety of opposition. Rivalries between clubs would not disappear if there were no league. The solution does not necessarily need to be the same for all areas.

There was a discussion about how the playing rules could be improved. One problem is that fast shift changes are difficult at rinks where the benches have no doors. Suggestions were

- Using 7 out-players.
- Playing without a buzzer.
- 1-minute shifts.

AGM VOTES

The EIHA took legal advice over many issues when they became a limited company. Over voting the solicitor had no hard and fast answer. When the EIHA first started there were deemed to be as many members as there were rinks. However it quickly became clear that most rinks had several independent clubs, often having little contact with each other. Rather than having a rink's senior, junior, women and rec clubs battling each other to control one vote, it made more sense to have one vote per team.

The system of one vote per team applies only to the company AGM, where often election of Directors and approval of the financial report are the only items requiring a vote. Most issues which junior clubs want to vote on affect only the Juniors, and can be dealt with at the Junior meeting. There is no way of allocating votes that everyone would consider fair. No club is able to make changes on its own without support from other clubs. Clubs may propose amendments to the Articles of Association at the AGM, but need to be aware of unintended consequences. Irene Jones has a list of which teams have returned their forms. She has been chasing up those who have not done so. If a club want to change the number of votes they have, they may request this in writing.

CHILD PROTECTION

BW said it is important to safeguard young participants, but certain clubs are using child protection as a tool to get what they want. Some clubs are more aware than others of the EIHA child protection policy and code of conduct for coaches, and of what child protection should and should not involve. Policies and guidelines are being updated regularly. Rinks have child protection policies and some of them run child protection courses. One club where there have been major child protection issues urged others to take it seriously. It is easy for even the most well-intentioned people to get into trouble. The bureaucracy and regulations, though annoying, not only protect young people but also mean clubs and their officers are not exposing themselves to risk of allegations. A coach whose job also involves young people said much of the guidelines is common sense, but people need to be careful over everything they say to players, and all physical contact. There are plenty of opportunities at child protection courses and coaching events to discuss these issues. Word of mouth is often a better way of spreading information than official documents.

CD said if there is an issue at a club they should let the regional child protection officer know. The EIHA cannot be expected to help in cases that they knew nothing about. Officers will do their best to keep it confidential. *There is no need to report a minor issue if the club are able to deal with it internally, but they need to report any allegations of sexual abuse, or sexual relations between an adult and a minor.*

Chelmsford said they found out that U16s need a performance licence to play senior hockey. Every council has different child employment regulations. People aged under 16 who need performance licences are also supposed to have a chaperone. Some other sports do not allow U16s to play in senior teams. This is different from the situation in Scotland, where there is no problem with it if the parents agree. While Essex County Council are not granting performance licences for hockey, other councils might. **CD** said this is a case of laws on entertainment being extended to sport without thinking it through. He is going to a child protection conference soon and will ask about it then. Although Chelmsford said being unaware of the law is no excuse, he does not think there is sufficient information available as yet to make a decision for the whole country.

LOW TOLERANCE

Low tolerance is IIHF policy adopted worldwide. However not all countries are dealing with it in the same way. An Ice Times article advocates more leeway than is being encouraged within the EIHA. Other countries are having the same problems. Canada has now unofficially dropped low tolerance, and some would like GB to do the same. Many think more people should be involved in decisions over major policy like this.

Low tolerance was brought in at short notice, giving clubs and officials little time to learn. Other changes such as the two-match ban for fighting meant an even steeper learning curve. **AB** explained that the IIHF did not release the information until July. He doubts that clubs would have been happier about a change of policy mid-season, or waiting a year so that the EIHA were far behind the rest of the world.

Officials are aware that the new interpretations are causing problems for clubs, but are expected to apply them. (This applies also to other rules, for example many players are being sent off when the puck accidentally goes over the boards.) **KR** explained that officials have been told to concentrate on sticking offences such as hooking, high sticks and interference. He asked if the clubs would prefer them to ignore these offences; they said no.

Players are dropping out as a direct result of low tolerance. It is rarely helping skilful players as was intended. Players are inhibited as they are scared to attack. There are now huge numbers of penalties. This means games take much longer, and some are not being finished. Although low tolerance is intended to speed up the game, it is causing it to slow down. This allows teams to keep the same players on for the whole game, and third lines are not getting on the ice.

Many consider the problem is not with the policy but with the officials and lack of consistency. **KR** said just like club personnel, officials are individuals with different levels of experience. It is unfortunate that they are remembered only for controversial incidents, while their good games are forgotten. Often officials do not seem able to tell which checks are legal. **AB** said 99% of players do not really know how to check. They should not put their hands up but use the shoulder or hip. If they make contact too low down, they will be called for tripping or clipping. Some referees do not consult their linesmen. It was pointed out that while problems between players and referees are sometimes a result of the referee's attitude or poor communication skills, there are also players who argue or do not want to listen, or insist on following the referee around after he has explained. There is a need for respect all round. Proposals for developing officials will be welcomed if they are properly thought out with costings. **KR** said he referees all games the same way, and some have lots of penalties and others very few – the difference is how the teams play. If players keep their sticks on the ice and their mouths shut they will not get penalties. **AB** said he has enjoyed watching most of the junior games. The supervisors are trying to cover all officials at least once during the season. More supervisors are being trained. Some instruction is done by internet. The clubs think one assessment per season nowhere near enough, especially when there have been such radical changes in policy.

Suggestions were

- DVDs of legal and illegal checks.
- Coaches to have discussions among themselves and send feedback to **AM**.
- A meeting about low tolerance.

Clubs said communication is vital, and the most important part of it is listening. Communication should be improved by having more meetings like this. **BW** said he is hoping to have another one, if possible before the annual meeting. Clubs should send him the topics in advance so that the meeting can be more structured. When they see the clubs who did not come, they should let them know what happened.