



USA Hockey
Executive Committee Conference Call
February 7, 2011
Minutes

Present: Ron DeGregorio (*Chair*), John Beadle, Walter Bush, Joe Eppolito (*Director Representative*), Dan Esdale, Sarah Fraser (*Athlete Representative*), Bill Hall, Dave Klasnick, Peter Lindberg, Kevin Miller (*Athlete Representative*), Larry Reid, Tony Rossi, Jim Smith, and Norm Spiegel (*Director Representative*) and John Tobin (*Director Representative*).

Absent: John Beadle and Colleen Coyne (*Athlete Representative*).

Staff members: Dave Ogreaan and Rae Briggie.

Call to Order

President Ron DeGregorio called the meeting to order. He asked for a review of the January 21, 2011 Executive Committee meeting minutes. There was a motion by Larry Reid (2nd by Peter Lindberg) to approve the minutes as amended. The minutes were approved.

President's Report

Ron reviewed his previously distributed President's Report. There was a discussion regarding the Playing Rule proposal regarding body checking. Ron mentioned that he has had many discussions with people at all levels of hockey and he has listened to their concerns. His February report is attached to these minutes.

Executive Director & Staff Reports

Dave Ogreaan reported that all departments are preparing the respective budget for the 2011-12 fiscal year.

As of February 7, total ice hockey registration is 563,000, which surpasses our 09-10 final count of 558,000. Adult registration has surpassed the 140,000 mark and 8&under registration has exceeded it's goal of 101,103 for the season

Council and Task Force Reports

Youth – Dave Klasnick reported that the Youth Council continues to discuss and study the Body Contact / Body Checking rule proposal. He reported that the Youth Council will revisit Tournament fees for Youth Tournaments at the District level.

Dave presented the decision reached by he and Norm Spiegel regarding the team registration of the Hudson Valley Polar Bears of the New York State Amateur Hockey Association. The president of the Hudson Valley Polar Bears youth hockey association had improperly completed the team registration and roster forms and had not complied with the registration-filing deadline (December 31, 2010). The NYSAHA ruled the teams ineligible for the NYSAHA State Tournament. The affected teams appealed the decision of the NYSAHA. After listening to the parties involved, with the association president admitting his errors, Dave and Norm decided to reinstate the teams' registrations and allow the teams to participate in the NYSAHA tournament.

Marketing - Larry Reid submitted a report for review. There were no questions regarding his electronic report.

The next scheduled Executive Committee Meeting is Monday, March 7, 2011.

Respectfully submitted,
William Hall,
Secretary

President's Executive Committee Report
February 7, 2011
Ron DeGregorio

Hockey season is getting closer to the end of year tournaments and playoffs. This season seems to be passing so much faster. Of course, there is much activity within USA Hockey.

Our Winter meeting was an excellent meeting with discussions on several issues including:

- Rule change proposals with much discussion on rules such as head hits, legal body checking in games not beginning until bantams, and "standard of play" discussions aimed at skill development and "risk management" to help protect players
- The junior/youth discussions on how best to better manage youth and junior activities seeking the same players of similar abilities.
- Growth and retention along with the progress of the American Development Model (ADM). The success of our registration in the 8 and Under category indicates that both the Growth & Retention 2 plus 2 program and the ADM is getting more traction within districts and affiliates along with the 8 and Under Red White and Blue (Cross Ice and small area games in practice) initiatives.

This June we will be voting on several rule change proposals affecting the issues above.

Recently during and after the Winter meetings, I have met with several people at the NHL All-Star game as well as discussions with USA Hockey District leaders. In these conversations, there is a clear majority of support for our efforts to improve the checking skill being taught our players. As we all know, the rule change is but one aspect of a new more comprehensive approach in teaching the skills required in giving and receiving a legal check. The proposed rule to introduce "legal checking" at Bantams (14 and under) in games is just one facet to teach the skill in a progressive way.

Even with the majority supporting our new approach, I have heard many intelligent people who are concerned with the rule's implementation. Some of the concerns come from a lack of understanding on the application of the new rule and a skill development program which is tied to the rule. Others are concerned with USA Hockey's ability to manage some of the practical considerations including referee and coach's role in implementing the program.

The key to implementing this new program with the new rule is that more body contact will be encouraged in the younger ages before peewees. In the peewee level, there will be body contact tolerated including one-on-one battles for positioning and puck separation checks. There will be no open ice hitting in peewees and below.

Those who have studied the issue making these recommendations indicate that the rule will be most effective if players learn "giving and receiving legal checks" at the peewee level in practice while their cognitive and physical skills mature enough to maximize other hockey skills and properly execute the body-checking skill. They also mention that the 11 and 12 year-old brain is more susceptible to concussions than an older brain. The plan is to provide more training on the skills of "giving and receiving a legal body-checks" during the peewee years in practice. For peewees, the training will also include using the skills in competitive small area games in practice with proper controls present.

So, we are training the checking skill in a "progressive", one step at a time manner in this new approach by USA Hockey. Some body contact is tolerated and encouraged in the mites and squirt ages, and much more will be encouraged and tolerated and in the standard of play for peewee players. So our message is: **USA Hockey is providing a new approach in teaching the skills of giving and receiving a check. The new rule change is just part of the program we are adopting to better teach the checking skill in a progressive, one step at a time manner.**

In communicating our plan, we will need to provide more information on how we will support the training of our coaches and referees in implementing this new approach. This new approach accepts that training

the skill of checking is a very important part of hockey that should be taught in a progressive manner. We need to explain the tools we have and are developing to support this important initiative.

The rule itself is not a panacea against concussions, and there is legitimate debate on that subject that should be considered. However, the bulk of the research indicates that moving legal body-checking in games to an older age and providing significant training before it begins is a smart risk management decision for players. I support the rule and the programs that surround it for two reasons:

- It provides a better skill development program for our players during the "golden ages" of an athlete's long term athlete development.
- It also improves managing certain potential risks for our players in the process.

I do agree that without three additional support elements, the rule will not have the desired results. The first is to improve our on-ice management of the game. Referee training as well as our coaching training may need to be more age specific. If checking will be taught and applied in a progressive manner, our referees and coaches must understand the progression and its application. Referees must be prepared to call the game in the pre-checking categories correctly and in line with the progressive nature of acceptable body contact. Since younger referees usually do the younger games, there needs to be a strategy communicated that helps assure the game management is acceptable and progressive.

The second item is better skill development and training for the players. I know using on-line training modules is becoming an important way to influence and train our coaches and referees. We specifically need our peewee coaches to understand very quickly the importance of working on the checking skills and how to train using our on-ice and off-ice checking materials along with small area games with proper instruction and controls at the peewee level. This needs to be managed also in conjunction with our ADM training. Otherwise, the peewee years of training will be wasted.

Finally, I believe we do need to reinforce our "standard of play" when it comes to checking for those who are allowed to check in youth hockey. We do have rules against boarding, charging, roughing, etc that do preclude intimidation checks in youth hockey now. There needs to be in the bantam age level a re-emphasis of a proper standard for our referees. I have asked our hockey department to provide language for a policy statement that addresses this standard of play issue. Fortunately, now in conjunction with our ADM, we do have tools now that can help influence and monitor how our coaches are addressing the checking skill development of bantams and peewees.

My final point is that the ADM addresses both the high performance and the hockey for life side. At the "Train to Train" stage at Bantams, the standard of play for high performance must accept the harder more intense game that is part of high performance hockey. The standard of play should be more highly protective for all our developing players.

I would welcome comments, concerns, and considerations of the view expressed here. As stewards of the game, communicating effectively the research and thought of USA Hockey's plans and its implementation support will bring quicker understanding and result in more skilled, elite players for our National teams while increasing overall retention rates of our organization.

Thanks for all you do.