

“Violence, Not Part of Youth Hockey”

A Pilot Project of the Nanaimo Minor Hockey Association Nanaimo, British Columbia

1. Background

There have been 2 major Canadian reports on violence in hockey. In 1974, William McMurtry Q.C. provided a report for the Government of Ontario entitled “Investigation and Inquiry into Violence in Amateur Hockey” (the “McMurtry Report”). Secondly, in 2000, Bernie Pascall, prepared a report for the Government of British Columbia entitled “Eliminating Violence in Hockey (the Pascall Report”).

The McMurtry Report outlined what he believed to be the causes of violence in amateur hockey as follows:

- (1) the influence of professional hockey with its emphasis on winning and use of violence as a tactical instrument to achieve that goal;
- (2) a rule structure (in professional and amateur hockey) which not only tolerates violence but encourages its use by rewarding those who excel in physical intimidation -- it also makes reciprocal violence inevitable;
- (3) lack of any proper definition of the purpose and objectives of amateur hockey, with its own model and rule structure;
- (4) failure of referees to apply existing rules, and inconsistency and lack of support for referees from fans, coaches and players;
- (5) failure of coaches to control players, and an emphasis on winning games rather than instilling the true value of sport and developing skills;
- (6) a lack of respect of players for rules and officials; and
- (7) undue pressure from parents, fans and coaches with over-emphasis on winning.

[VIOLENCE IN SPORT: POLICY CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE AMATEUR SPORT ORGANIZATION, Hilary A. Findlay, Presented at the Symposium "Sports Management: Cutting Edge Strategies For Managing Sports as a Business", August 2002, Toronto]

Amateur Hockey in BC has made progress since 1974. There have been rule changes introduced to protect players and programs have been instituted to educate players, coaches and parents on what type of conduct is unacceptable.

The Pascall Report released in 2000 determined that while a level of aggression and intensity is inherent to hockey, there is growing concern about player safety and increasing levels of violence manifest by deliberate violent behaviours (p.13). It was noted that youth hockey suffers from the following harmful influences:

1. aggressive parents;
2. “hard line” coaching styles; and
3. negative NHL role models.

(p.4)

The Pascall Report further states at page 4:

“Hockey has created a culture where certain violent acts that are punishable if they occurred on the streets are ‘part of the game’ when occurring on the ice”.

The Pascall Report defines “Violence” in hockey, for the purposes of the report, as:

“physical assault or other physically harmful act that is intended to intimidate or cause physical pain or injury to another”.

(p.11)

At page 18, the Pascall Report comments on the notion that “violence is part of the game” and states:

“...this “violence is apart of the game “ social conditioning is somewhat unique to hockey. For the most part, particularly in the sport of hockey, aggression and violence is learned behaviour - cultivated and nurtured by a number of influences, not the least of which are the very role models that young players are exposed to - parents, coaches, other players and professional athletes. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.”

The Pascall Report notes that 100 injuries a year in British Columbia can be attributed to “violent” or “illegal” (e.g. checking from behind, hit by stick) tactics (p.42).

Also at page 42, the Pascall Report refers to a report by the Canadian Academy of Sport Medicine which, in a position paper, advocated that there should be:

1. a complete elimination of fighting in hockey;
2. increased enforcement of existing rules prohibiting unsafe acts; and
3. major educational programs aimed at coaches, trainers, players and parents to “deinstitutionalize the current norms of violence and injury”.

2. Targeting the “Violence”

The Nanaimo Pilot Project is designed to monitor on-ice activity of a violent nature that merits an offending player or coach to receive either a reprimand (warning) or punishment in the form of suspension.

The specific conduct being monitored will include but not be limited to:

- (a) fighting;
- (b) dangerous stick-work;
- (c) hitting or checking from behind;
- (d) boarding;
- (e) roughing after the whistle;
- (f) abuse of officials.

The reprimand or suspension contemplated under the Pilot Project shall be in addition to and not in substitution for any discipline assigned to the offender by game or league officials or the British Columbia Amateur Hockey Association.

3. The Discipline

The President of the Nanaimo Minor Hockey Association (“NMHA”), pursuant to Article VIII (2) of the NMHA By Laws, is authorized to:

“suspend any team, player, team official...for unbecoming behaviour on or off the ice, abusive language to any of the officials..”

and to:

“...inform any player, coach, manager, official of a team...of a suspension in violation of the rules and regulations ...on or off the ice”.

On the basis of this authority, a scheme is in place to give effect to the discipline contemplated in the Pilot Project.

4. The Methodology

All game sheets are reviewed to ascertain whether an on-ice activity of a violent nature occurred. In addition, parents, coaches and players will be encouraged to report an activity of a violent nature irrespective of whether the activity is noted in a game sheet. Interviews with witnesses may be arranged in order to verify information.

All offending players (or coaches) will receive a letter from NMHA outlining the alleged violent act and will be asked to respond in writing to the allegation. All acts of a violent nature will result in discipline. All repeat offenders will be required to attend an interview with the President of the NMHA.

Any player or coach that fails to respond to a letter or fails to attend an interview or any player or coach that, in the opinion of the President of the NMHA, habitually commits on-ice activities of a violent nature will be suspended indefinitely.

5. The “No Tolerance for Violence” Code

Prior to a player being provided with his or her team jersey, the player’s coach shall obtain the written agreement of both the player and the player’s parent that each will abide by the NMHA “No Tolerance for Violence” Code. The Coach must also sign an acknowledgment that he or she agrees to abide by the Code.

The NMHA “No Tolerance for Violence” Code states:

For players:

- (a) I will learn, understand and play by the rules;
- (b) I am responsible for and must control my actions - I will control myself at all times or I will leave the ice;
- (c) I will respect my opponents by being mindful of their safety;
- (d) I will never act in a disrespectful way towards a referee.

For Parents (Spectators):

- (a) I will assist my child to understand and play by the rules of the game;
- (b) I will remind my child, whenever necessary, that acting in a violent manner is not an acceptable part of youth hockey;
- (c) I will never act in a disrespectful way towards a referee;
- (d) I am responsible for and must control my actions - I will control myself at all times or I will leave the arena;
- (e) I will not vocally or by my actions antagonize, criticize or heckle anyone.

For Coaches:

- (a) I will lead by example and respect the rules;
- (b) I will teach my players to play by the rules;
- (c) I am responsible for and must control my actions - I will control myself at all times or I will leave the arena;
- (d) I will not tolerate any violent conduct on the part of my players;
- (e) I will never act in a disrespectful way towards a referee;
- (f) I will not vocally or by my actions antagonize or heckle anyone.

6. Objective of the Pilot Project

The basic objectives of the Pilot Project include:

- (a) to provide a safe and fun environment for children to play hockey;
- (b) to educate children in youth hockey that violence is not an acceptable part of the game;
- (c) to educate both children and their parents on the distinction between acceptable and unacceptable conduct in youth hockey;
- (d) to achieve a reasonable level of safety in youth hockey without compromising the pursuit of high-level competitive play;
- (e) to set an example or model for other Youth Hockey Associations in North America on how to keep violence out of youth hockey.

=====

September 10, 2003

Nanaimo Minor Hockey Association
PO Box 562
Nanaimo, B.C.
V9R 5L9

e-mail ~ nanaimomha@shaw.ca
Website ~ www.hockeynanaimo.com
Tel: 250-758-0833
Fax: 250-758-5099

Chuck Blanaru, President
Tel: Office – 250 - 753-2202
e-mail: cblanaru@nanaimolaw.com