

“It Is Just a Game”

By Steven Drews, IHOA President

As parents, coaches, officials and players all come together to play the game we all love and expect the most from each other; some of us struggle to hold back or feel we have the right to express ourselves in ways that are detrimental to the game. After all we are human in nature, and we all see things in a different way when it comes to our loved ones. Let's face it, the amount of experience or knowledge of the game we feel we may have may not be the same as the person next to us. What we believe to be a rule may have been a rule before, but is no longer. In the past USA Hockey has made rule changes every two years, but as of last season they have elected to make rule changes every four years.

That being said, is it right for us to yell and swear at anyone who is involved in the game? Does it make a difference what level of play they are involved in? What right does a parent have to bend over the glass from the stands, or a coach on the bench or even a player on the ice, and yell obscenities at a new or even an experienced official trying to do what they feel is right or what they were taught to do? Should that official be able to walk into your office, school or job and berate you on a mistake you may have made or what you thought was right? We all make mistakes in life, but that is what makes us better people. Next time before you get angry at an official, take a second and ask yourself, “If that was my child would I want someone to yell at my son, daughter, brother or sister that in that way?”

Today we are losing officials at an alarming rate due to the behavior of those in and around the game. Even more experienced officials are asking themselves, “Why should I do this?” Not to make excuses for officials, but we are human and sometimes we have a bad game. Sometimes a brand new official is working one of their very first games and they just may have missed a call. We think of a young kid as a brand new official, but in fact more adults are taking up officiating. It should not make a difference what the fault or error is; it does not give anyone the right to disrespect or belittle an official. One would hope the best official possible is working the game in which they are officiating, but let's face it you are lucky if you have that experienced official working the mite or squirt level game. It is more likely that a younger, less experienced official will be working that game and the upper level official is working upper level games. Also some officials are working hard to progress to upper level games; therefore, you may see a less experienced official at the higher levels. As the end of the season rolls around you will see the more experienced official working your game. He or she may call something that was not called all season (when in fact it is a penalty or should have been called). Some officials hold a tighter line on what a penalty is then others and this disparity is what all officials struggle with.

It should not make a difference what the fault was. Communication with the coach or captain, depending on the level and circumstances, should be done as long as both parties can agree to talk in a respectful manner and agree to disagree in the end. Too often a game deteriorates due to a coach yelling about a no call or missed call. The players seem to follow the coach's lead and the game suffers.

It is not easy to be on the ice and see all that is going on - watching the puck, 12 players or even 22 players at line changes, skating and getting to the proper position to make the call, where the players, puck and lines are in relation to the call being made at that time and make a split second decision.

Next time you're about to yell or have a break down due to an official, take a second and think about the kids who are there to enjoy the game. Hockey is a fast paced game that we all love and enjoy watching. So take a step back and enjoy the game. No matter if you win or lose, it is just a game.