**U6 & U7 Coordinator year end report**

This season was my first with CMHA as a board member and I can honestly say it was eye opening…sports have certainly changed since I was a child.

Since I am only one voice within the age group, I didn’t feel it was my place to be the only voice in the year end report. To give all stakeholders within the U6 and U7 age groups a voice, I conducted a year end survey of parents within the age groups.

Here are some of the key findings:

* 76% rated the season overall, either excellent or good
* 60% rated the Board/Division coordinator’s performance as excellent or good
* 76% rated the Coach’s performance as excellent or good
* 64% agreed (36% disagreed) that grouping the players by development level, IE, “A” and “B” players, was what was best for a player’s development
* 83% are comfortable speaking with their coach
* 83% are comfortable speaking with their manager
* 45% are comfortable speaking with the Board
* 60% feel that CMHA is an inclusive environment (32% said partially inclusive)
* 74% either like 4:00PM practices or ‘make them work’ (60%)
* 85% enjoyed seeing the kids wear their jerseys for weekend practice throughout the season
* 32% say it is time for a new nickname/logo—time for something different than the “C’s”
* 80% will be returning to CMHA next season (20% are unsure)

In conclusion of the findings I’d like to share few thoughts and ideas.

**Number 1:** The top priority for the Board to focus on within these age groups should be to outlining clearly with this age group is all about, IE mission and value statements (is it about fun, equality and fairness or is it about competition, evolution and development or is it something in the middle) A few coaches mentioned they were unsure of the expectations, as well, at times, coaches seem to be doing whatever they decided without any input from the Board or TOC. To get everyone on the same page, more collaboration is needed and clear values need to be established.

**Number 2:** We need to remember that most of the parents in this age group are coming in with little to no knowledge of how minor hockey works. Hockey can be an intimidating environment and the Board needs to do more next year to provide and inclusive space, where people can learn and ask questions. Related to this, I also found it to be interesting that despite having a number of parents with experience managing teams, all five of our team managers were brand new to the role. I find that interesting because, to me, it means we haven’t done a very good job helping team mangers in the past so they want nothing to do with the role in the future.

My two suggestions for next year are to host a meeting with all new hockey parents (I’ve heard this happened all the time prior to Covid, so I’m not sure why it wasn’t done this year). I think a meeting like this would clear up a lot of the miscommunication that happened, as well and give parents and chance to meet and mingle with other parents on their kids team. As well, hopefully it would help parents feel more comfortable with the Board as having only 45% comfortable speaking with the Board is a low number. My second suggestion for next year is to bring in a mentorship program for team managers. I think our team managers, Warren, Lauren, Amit, Ted and Chad did a fantastic job this season given the circumstances. I think if there was a program where they could be paired with a team manager mentor to talk to may help—I think in a lot of cases I was their go to, and being new myself, I didn’t always have the answers. We also need to make things easier to find on our website as it can be a task tracking down info for both parents and managers.

**Number 3:** Despite emails sent by the board, we saw players wearing their jerseys more that we had in past years—previous teams only wore them for games, not in weekend practices. The survey results were almost unanimous in that players seem to enjoy wearing their official jerseys for the weekend sessions. Comments like, “They feel more like a team”, “They feel apart of CMHA” and “They get excited to play in them” were made by the parents.

The Board’s concern with wearing jerseys more that 10-12 times a year is that they will wear out faster and there potentially could be unplanned future costs to CMHA, IE what if the jerseys wear out in two years rather than the planned three years?

All that being said, I think CMHA should listen to their members on this issue—85% is pretty substantial. Fee increases in future years could be explored to cover replacing jerseys more often if it becomes and issue.

**Number 4:** The final thing I’ll comment on is the dividing of players up into, quote, “A’s” and “B’s”. Personally, I have never seen anything like this in youth sports at this age. I’m not sure how promoting segregation amongst five and six-year-olds builds organizational culture, teams and community—which are the values we should be trying to instill in these kids. It’s a very tricky slope when you start breaking kids up into groups, as often, players in the “A” group can develop a sense of entitlement and act like they’re better than others (amongst other behavioural issues), while players in the “B” group can start to feel like they are not good enough and wonder why they aren’t playing alongside the players on the team they look up to, even though they are on the same team. It also does nothing to build a “team”.

Games are a perfect example of why we shouldn’t be promoting the division of players. Often, the “A” group will win a game by 5-8 goals and think, that sure was easy. On the “B” group’s side, they will often lose by 5-10 goals and be left wondering what the point was to playing the game—this type of performance is likely why the survey saw comments like, “Why are other teams so much better than us,” and “The coaches only care about the “A” group.”—the later comment I strongly disagree with as I believe Jason, Martin, Pascal, Darryl, Tyler, Vik, Tom, Derek, Jaret, David and Corey did a great job with the kids and did their best to develop each and every player equally.

If we’re going to go to the trouble to balance the teams at the start of there season, it just makes sense to make sure they stay in balanced groups for practices and games. By doing so the top players will have the opportunity to play in close games, lead more and help some of the newer players and the players just starting out will have a better understanding of where they need to get to and what it feels like to win once in a while. I also think this would lead more people feeling CMHA is an inclusive environment—only 60% thinking it is, is concerningly low of a number in my opinion.

However, with all that said, I do feel there is a need to follow what the membership decides and/or wants. The survey results showed that 64 per cent were in favour of dividing the groups. Many people highlighted that new players may be discouraged if they were to practice with experienced players and not be able to keep up, and thus not enjoy or give up the sport, which is a fair point that can potentially happen. This is a topic that should be considered when putting together the values and mission statement of this age group. If it is decided that splitting the group up is what is desired, that decision needs to be communicated and explained with parents so that any tension coming out of this decision is mitigated.

In closing, I’d like to once again highlight the work of our coaches, Jennifer, Brad, Larry, Jason, Martin, Pascal, Darryl, Tyler, Vik, Tom, Derek, Jaret, David and Corey. Many of them had never coached before (I believe we had 7 first time coaches) and they selflessly stepped up and committed hours (50-75 hours each) of their time with little support from the Association. The high overall rating of the season is a testament to the quality of work they put in this year. Hopefully with increased support, next season will be even better. Thank you.