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The Paradox of Minor Hockey Accessibility

Hopefully the outcome of Teri Pecoskie's series "Pay to Play" includes creating many conversations across the city and hockey community. Getting people discussing the presented problem, cause, and fix may generate more ideas and momentum to implement new ideas to improve all levels of minor hockey.

Align the findings of the "Grow the Game" global Bauer initiative launched in 2012 to the problem raised by "Pay to Play", you find the paradox that is created as result of the passion that Canadians have for hockey. The focus on playing at an elite level creates the environment which is not perceived as "fun" and becomes a barrier for some to starting playing hockey. The "Grow the Game" research and solution are noted on their website "www.TheFirstShift.ca".

Hockey is perceived to many non-hockey families as not being considered fun. The survey showed that other youth sports included fun as a top response, such as: Soccer, Basketball, Baseball, Ball Hockey, Snowboarding/Skiing. Some of the reasons it was not perceived as fun includes: "too focused on elite play". Other barriers perceived as fun blockers were: "Other parents are too competitive, intimidating", "my child didn't start early enough", and "there are a lot of negative stories about hockey in the media".

Where hockey is unique and stands alone amongst minor sports are themes such as: "Helps build character / life-skills for my child" and "Has strong role models for children to look up to". With soccer, hockey shared the feedback that they "provide a welcoming environment".

"Pay to Play" could suggest that success in minor hockey is only measured by playing at an elite level. The suggestion of this as the measure of success may in fact contribute to one of the perceived barriers to a fun environment.

My involvement with minor hockey is focused to growing the game at any level that our kids have the access and ability to play. I would consider it a successful minor hockey career for any player that has: made friends, learned hockey skills which they will be able to enjoy in adulthood, had independence of being responsible for their schedules, experienced team building and growing, and more and more life and character building skills which even non-hockey families recognize.

I was glad to see the series promoted the registration fee assistance programs available within Hamilton. These programs enable a successful career to be possible at our city's house league programs. Transportation and lower city proximity remain a problem but bright new ideas may be generated from discussion triggered by this Spectator series.

A further example of the solution already in flight is The First Shift as the start of more corporate involvement in the growth of the game. This program is currently open for registration and will run in February/March promoting: Fun, Safety, Accessibility, and Affordability.

The Alliance Association (which the Hamilton Minor Hockey Council is governed) has its own series of grow the game promotions. These are geared to promote the game to new players: look for November 18th's Jersey day and Bring a Buddy promotion on November 18-20 weekend.

If you visit Chedoke Minor hockey at the Chedoke Twin Pad Arena or on online, you will experience our brand beliefs of: Community, Fair Play, and Recreation. We have been focused on ensuring we provide an accessible program which our players and families can have a successful minor hockey career.

Jason Mancini
President, Chedoke Minor Hockey