

Behind the scenes of minor hockey

by Diana Waltmann

*Walk into the arena most evenings between October and April and what do you see?
A bunch of kids playing hockey—half of them sporting the blue uniform of Acton.
And if a kid in blue happens to score a goal, what do you see?
I see Acton pouting, pocketing, clinching, collecting, connecting, counting, countering, nipping or knicking a lead.
A parent sees their son execute a perfect play.
A coach sees his game plan put into action.
A fan only sees that Acton must not lose.
A player sees everyone else look on in approval.
What we see is only the surface.*

Acton Acton Minor Hockey Association has been icing allstar teams since 1952—first in tri-county and now in the Waterloo-Wellington league. But what goes on the ice is only the end result of hundreds of local residents working behind the scenes of minor hockey, organizing schedules, reserving ice time, acquiring equipment, matching coaches and players, appeasing parents and above all, managing finances. All of them are volunteers.

Bruce Cargill, the small, soft-spoken owner of a garage and motor home sales is this year's president of the Association. He said the only reason he is president is because they couldn't find anyone else to do the job. He said he got involved in minor hockey because his sons are and because he wanted to improve the organization and help out any way he could.

Cargill, along with Barry Insoce (past president), Herb Dodds (first vice-president and WW contact), Lynn Smith (second vice), Fran McKnight (secretary), Joan Yalowica (treasurer), Richard Kilpatrick (equipment manager) and Dave McEachern (contact) form the nucleus of the AMHA as the executive.

You may think the hockey season starts in October, but for the newly-elected executive hockey officially starts on July 1, when they take charge. It ends June 30.

DUTIES VARIED

The president acts as chairman at the monthly meetings, which he schedules, appoints an equipment manager from the ranks of his or her executive or directors, forms all the necessary committees, acts as a representative at Legion hockey meetings, refrains from voting, unless he needs to break a tie, signs cheques, hopes they won't bounce, calls an election at the end of the hockey schedule and acts as spokesman for the Association.

"In short," says Cargill, "make sure all problems are straightened out."

So what kind of problems does the president of the AMHA run into?

"Got three days?" he asks.

Problem: Money. Minor hockey in Acton runs on the same thing everything else in life does—financing. The AMHA budgeted \$23,055 this year, up from approximately \$18,000 spent last year.

The main villain of course was ice rental fees. They shot up an extra \$5 an hour. Ice rental took a \$12,540 chunk out of this year's budget.

"We upped the registration price but it doesn't cover one third of the extra cost," Cargill said.

500 CLUB

Money for the AMHA is raised primarily through the 500 Club lottery—which is more complex than any lottery the government could think of—but what it boils down to is someone wins a trip to Hawaii and another goes to Florida.

Financing also comes from sponsorship, donations, gate receipts and registration.

But Cargill says, when you add all the expenses the money goes quickly. The Association supplies sweaters, socks and pants for each boy which costs

them \$3,000 a year. Referees get paid for being booted—that's another \$2,350 a year. There are a lot of other costs as well.

And since the teams are becoming more competitive in the league Cargill adds, it's even more expensive because extra ice time needs to be bought.

But of course the main objective is to win. As the AMHA constitution states one of the purposes of the Association is "to provide the knowledge, motivation and facilities necessary to make our teams more competitive with other towns."

Problem: Trying to get enough ice time. The AMHA is competing with several other groups for the arena's ice time. With nine teams playing a home game once a week and at least an hour's practice on top of that, scheduling which is Herb Dodds' job, is a nightmare.

COACHES NEEDED

Problem: finding enough coaches. By some miracle, 14 people have made applications to become coaches for 1980-81 season.

"Last year we had only four coaches for nine teams," Cargill said. "We had to beg people to coach."

Cargill says the Association will appoint an assistant coach and manager (each team has one, but they'd prefer a coach who has names submitted.)

"We're quite happy with this year's choices," he commented. "We've had some first year coaches, but that just means they'll be a good asset for next year."

"We've never had a serious problem with coaches' behaviour towards the kids or anyone else. Most of them have indicated they'll be back for next year."

But a few aren't, which leads us to the next problem.

"Parents," says Cargill with an exasperated sigh. "If they would just sit down, watch the game and keep their mouths shut. One starts talking, and idea goes around and pretty soon you have a whole group complaining."

"Oh, they'll never be satisfied," says Lynn Smith. "You're damned if you do and damned if you don't."

VOLUNTEERS CRUSHED

"You're in a voluntary capacity, trying to do the best job you can. You have to be tough. You can have your confidence totally shattered by complaints. Being a volunteer makes it harder to shrug them off." She takes care of equipment, sponsors, appreciation night and the awards night banquet.

Parents usually complain about ice time, says Cargill and that their little Johnny isn't getting enough.

"Complaints about ice time are chronic," Smith agrees. They still think of their kids as children, which makes it a coaching problem."

Her husband Cope Smith, coach of Ed's In-N-Out Midgets, one of the most successful teams this season, says, "Parents are telling their kids not to pass the puck to such and so because he's no good, and he won't give it back."



"I have one parent who's paying his kid for every goal he gets. Naturally he's not going to pass the puck. The other kids are hollering at me to take him off and before you know it the guys are fighting between themselves on the bench."

"And I have to wait until between periods before I can undo everything the parents have done."

For proof, Smith points to the team's record. In several playoff games the midgets played rather lousy hockey in the first two periods always making a comeback in the third.

"I have got the parents in the crowds hollering at the kids. The guys don't want to go on the ice because they're afraid of making a mistake. I had one boy in tears."

"I had one parent hollering at his kid to get skating, get a goal while all the time his son was sitting on the bench."

"It's insane."

PARENT PROBLEMS

Smith isn't the only coach with parent problems either, but others don't like to discuss it. There again, a few coaches say they have no problems.

"You know," muses Mrs. Smith, "you think you have a coaching staff of three, but really you have coaching staff of however many parents are in the arena."

Everyone agreed it's harder when a team begins to win games. "Now they are expected to win and if they don't it's the coaches' fault. If they do—it's the kids," says Mrs. Smith.

The AMHA has set up a system, Cargill explains, whereby each team gets a director. The director has no affiliation with the team. If a parent has a problem they should first approach the, assistant coach or manager. If they can't work things out, the problem is handed to the director. If the problem still isn't solved it is put in front of the executive.

OMHA GOVERNS

The Ontario Minor Hockey Association (OMHA) which governs everything the AMHA does, was brought in for one problem this year.

"The kids don't pose nearly as many problems," Cargill said, "at least nothing is serious. But four boys did walk off the bench because they weren't getting equal ice times. That's the parents talking again."

But Cargill stressed "when the boys were picked for W-W they are picked to represent Acton and that means they will NOT get equal ice time. At the beginning of the season we had a meeting with all the parents. We tell them if equal ice time is what they want they had better withdraw their son and put

him in house league. Ice time is not guaranteed. "We feel with the superior coaching and extra ice time, the boys are much further ahead in rep hockey than in house league," he continued.

The parent problem is more frustrating for Cargill because volunteers find their work goes unappreciated and consequently they drop out.

"This is my last year," says Lynn Smith. "It's not a thankless job because you're not in it for the thanks. You're in it for the kids. I enjoyed working with the people involved in minor hockey too."

WORTH IT

"I really don't know whether or not I'm coaching next year," said Cope Smith. "You sit there and wonder if it's worth it. But I also believe there is nothing anyone can do about it."

Of course everyone is quick to point out not all parents are bad. Only the loud ones.

"We have an awful lot of good parents and good support too," says Mrs. Smith. "The Hockey Moms do a good job. Most parents are co-operative."

"There are super parents backing us too," Cope Smith said. "I like them all. I've known them for a long time and off the ice they are nice people, but in a hockey game—look out."

Herb Dodds, who has been associated with minor (Continued on Page B2)



Bruce Cargill, president of AMHA
Lynn Smith, vice-president of AMHA
Herb Dodds, vice-president of AMHA

Moms help the Association

When the midget team from Mora Sweden were in town, they were wined and dined in a style only the Acton Hockey Moms could produce.

The Hockey Moms are just that—a group of mothers whose sons are playing on allstar teams.

Doreen Mitchell is president of the two-year-old group. "A bunch of us got together last year because we wanted to put funds back into the Association."

She said they raise money through bake sales and raffles, plus the Christmas bazaar. They are also planning to publish a cookbook.

The Moms ran the booster Club at Sabres games as well.

The Hockey Moms meet periodically, usually once a month on a Monday night. "That's about the only time most of us aren't at a hockey game."

Mrs. Mitchell, who's son plays for the minor peewees, said the group is large. "Pretty well everyone gets involved. We have one mother as a co-ordinator for each team, plus the executive. (Mrs. Baker is the vice-president, Fiona Hodgson Secretary and Carol Smith

treasurer).

"We just donate time when it's needed."

The Moms also help with the annual awards banquet, this year on April 19. "We'll be giving trophies and crests to all the players because the Waterloo-Wellington league can't give out individual awards."

"They'll be giving awards to teams which went the furthest in the OMHA playoffs and those which finished first in the league. "The kids appreciate it," Mrs. Mitchell stated. "They enjoy representing Acton and gives them a memento of it."

This is just the beginning of the Moms, who raised \$1,500 last year and who sponsored the minor Atoms. "We haven't done too much this year because most of us are always on the road, travelling to games. But being new, we still have lots of other projects to do."

"You know it's hard for the league to pay for ice time and equipment. We just want to help the organization."

Oh, adds Mrs. Mitchell. The Hockey Moms have no dads. "Men wouldn't be too helpful in a bake sale," she chuckled.

Steelworkers cop W-W title

Acton's Steelworker Major Atoms captured the Wellington-Waterloo championship title in style, with a 5-0 win.

Five Steelworker marksmen netted goals against New Hamburg in the total points series last week. Meanwhile at the other end of the rink Acton's netminder stopped all shots aimed in his direction.

Acton mustered five points from two victories and one tie against New Hamburg.

Except for the 2-2 game the forwards played sound positional hockey, according to coach

Danny McGilloway.

For the wins, the forwards had to back-check with force. The defencemen stood their ground on the blue line. And if someone in New Hamburg colors managed to slip through all that, there were the goalies.

Peter Cargill set up Mike Baker for the first goal—the winning goal of the game. Jason O'Neill bulged the twine next on a solo effort to make the tally 2-0 for Acton.

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Coaches say

"We do it all for the kids"

The best part of coaching allstar hockey is watching the players develop, according to the coaches of Acton's minor hockey teams.

"I don't think I've had a better bunch of guys," said Cope Smith, coach of Ed's In-N-Out Midgets. "Just a super group of kids. That's why you want to help them as much as you can."

"I like being with the kids," says Dan McGilloway, coach of the Steelworker Atoms. "The kids really enjoy it too. They seem to have fun."

"I really enjoy the game of hockey," said Ron Salmon. He coaches the Alton McIsaac Concrete Construction Novices. "For me it's working with the boys and seeing them develop as a team."

"I enjoy working with the kids," says Jim Haggitt, who coaches the Lions Club minor peewees. "The kids need someone to coach them."

Coaching isn't as easy as it looks, as most will tell you. Cope Smith said at the beginning of the year, his coaching staff of Bill Hodgson and Jamie Vickery had set out several objectives—the primary one being attitudes. "The most important thing is attitude, second is skills and third is conditioning. But skills aren't worth a darn if the attitude isn't there."

SPORTSMANSHIP

"We try to teach them good sportsmanship. One of our objectives was to cut down on penalties." Besides those two objectives Smith says, they wanted to build a balanced team, provide a cross-section of quality hockey through tournaments international play and go as far as possible in the OMHA playoffs.

Coaching takes up a lot of time. Besides the games twice a week, there is an average of three tournaments a year, countless exhibition games and practice times.

There are other costs as well. "Bill (Hodgson), drove his camper to away games and that costs a lot on gas," Smith said.

"But this is the first year the three of us are asking ourselves if it was really worth it," he added.

Coaching becomes difficult says Smith, when the parents holler at the boys and when they start fighting amongst themselves in the crowd.

READY TO QUIT

Smith said the players don't appreciate their parents' comments either. "They say they'd like to see their parents on the ice practising what they're preaching. I had one boy ready to quit because of his parents. I have another calling me at least once a week, confiding in me."

"That's one of the rewards of coaching; knowing you can help a kid out."

Smith started out coaching baseball. But he says he switched to hockey to be closer to his two sons, Randy and Rick, who both play on the midget squad. The Smiths have been involved in sports for 10 years.

Ron Salmon started coaching in Toronto five years ago. "It's my way of being involved in the sport. I really enjoy the game and the competition."

I've always been involved in hockey. It's a great game." And now his interest has heightened because his son has started playing it.

Salmon, unlike Smith and a few other coaches, says he has experienced no parent problems. "It's been a very positive year as far as parent support goes. I have had no problems whatsoever."

NO PROBLEMS

Dan McGilloway is another coach who hasn't had parent problems. "The parents have been really co-operative. There has been no big hassles this year."

This is McGilloway's second year as coach and he says he plans to return to minor peewees next season.

"It's been a good year," concludes McGilloway. "We won the league title this year, and the regional silver strike, and came close in a couple of tournaments."

"I want to stay in coaching and stay with the kids. Jim Haggitt is not so sure he's returning. "At the end of the season you feel kind of fed up, but if they need someone next fall I may wind up going back."

Haggitt admitted to a few parents complaining about ice time. "In my view the biggest problem is the attitude that we must win. In order to follow that, I have to play the best kids, especially at playoff time."

CHANGE RULES

"If minor hockey changed the rules like the government report suggests, coaches would be able to give all kids equal time."

"As it is now, if I didn't play the lines, we'd be sitting ducks. It's hard to bench a player) as a person, but as a coach there's no choice."

Two players quit the Lions this season because they felt they weren't getting equal ice time. Still it's been a good year.

"I thought we did well" said Haggitt. We were two points out of third spot, went all the way to the quarter-finals of the OMHA and went the full round in W-W before losing the title in the last game. I don't know what the parents think."

About the only other criticism anyone had of the league is of the refereeing. "If there is a place for improvement Smith said, it is in the refereeing. The quality of hockey has risen but refs are static."

The kids are getting away with too much spearing and butt ending. The refs are paid, so there's no excuse."

Herb Dodds, vice-president of the Association and Bruce Cargill, president of the same, agree the refereeing needs improvement. But that's about the only thing.

"I really enjoyed meeting everyone through the Association," Smith said, "I met a lot of good people."

"And the executive is really working hard. There is an awful lot of fan support too. Whenever we needed an assistant, someone was there."

And in a smooth-running organization of volunteers—that's the name of the game.



Cope Smith, midget coach



Dan McGilloway, atom coach