



Racing back at Mohawk

It's almost here, race fans. Mohawk Racetrack's 2002 spring season — complete with nightly action five days a week — will begin Thursday with a post time of 7:40 p.m. The Campbellville oval's 46-day schedule will be highlighted by nine special events, including the Spring Pacing Championship Final Saturday, April 13.

Mohawk offers live racing on Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday evenings. A special Sunday night program has been added for May 19 to tie in with Family Fireworks Night.

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It's as if the referee isn't human

On my way into the arena for a hockey tournament recently, I came across a coach I knew and asked him how his team did.

"We lost," he replied. "The referee screwed us."

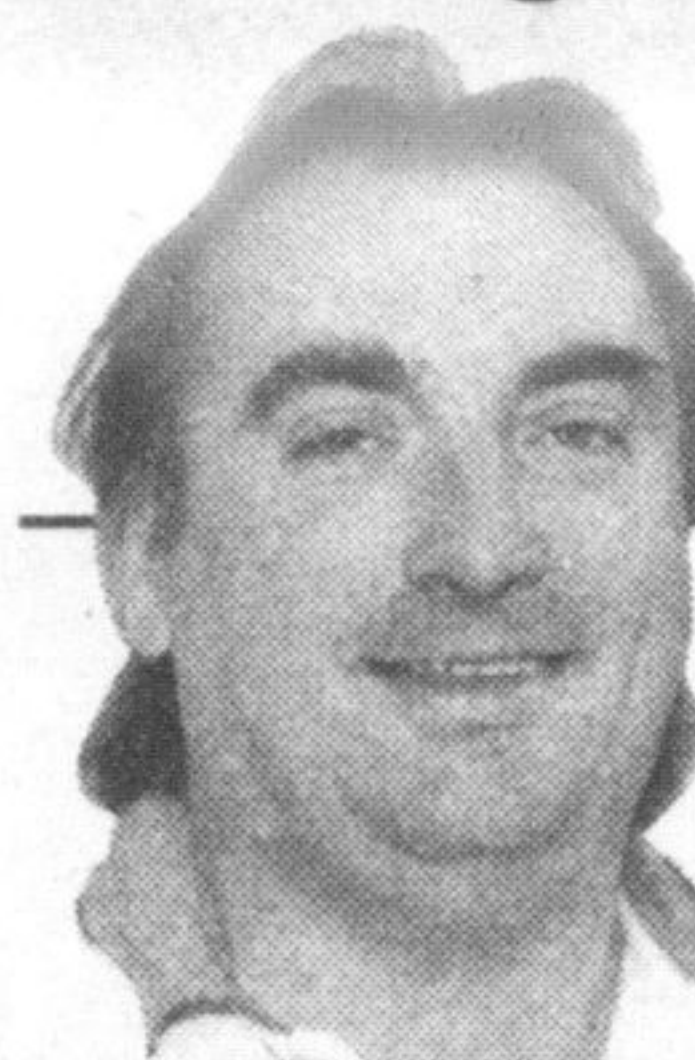
Not entirely unsympathetic, I asked him where the referee lost that game for them.

"6-1."

Uh, yeah, okay, you can definitely see

where the referee lost that game for them. Not 20 minutes later, I watched the end of a close game with teams I wasn't involved with. The team losing 2-1 was buzzing around the net in the final minute. A shot from the point appeared to me to be deflected by a high stick before it went into the net.

The fans of the team that scored went crazy until the referee consulted with his linesmen and decided the goal wouldn't count.



Out in left field

with MURRAY TOWNSEND

The same fans went crazy again, but this time against the referee. They pounded on the glass, they called him names, they used language that would make a trucker blush.

After the game in the lobby, a grandmother held court and announced over and over again in a loud voice that it was "disturbing!"

Less than an hour after that, in a game a team was losing handily, the fans of one team were going berserk. One parent walked around to the open area in the glass by his team's bench shaking his fist and screaming obscenities at the referee. In the stands, another irate father was announcing to everyone that the referee was "stupid." Veins were popping out of his head while he stomped around.

The referee abuse has gotten to be so commonplace that I'm actually shocked when a penalty is given out and nobody yells a thing from the stands. It's rare, very rare.

The only good thing I can see is that it's also rare for the players themselves to actually complain when given a penalty. They don't get personal or swear because they know they'll be given a misconduct.

I did the timekeeping at a bantam game this past weekend in a penalty-filled contest and not one player complained to the referee about the penalty he was given. A couple were mad at themselves and a couple were mad at the opposing player who caused them to take the penalty, but not a word to the referee.

Naturally the parents were jumping around like monkeys inside a cage, but I think it's tremendous progress that the game has controlled itself to eliminate that type of thing within the game for the most part.

Controlling the parents and fans is a far different story.

It's as if the referee isn't a human being. These same people who give themselves free reign to say anything they want to the

individual wearing the stripes would never dream of confronting somebody like that face to face. People aren't held accountable for what they say so there's nothing stopping them.

A story I heard, whether it's true or not, involves a man constantly yelling at an individual player on the ice, saying that he was an idiot, was a lousy player, didn't know what he was doing, etc. When the boy's father angrily came to ask him what he thought he was doing, he said that he thought it was okay since the player's father was yelling the same type of thing at his son, who happened to be the referee.

Referees are pretty thick-skinned. I think they're supposed to act as if they don't hear and don't care, but it gets to them.

I talked to a AAA coach who used to yell at referees all the time, who said he sees fewer and fewer problems from coaches, although there are still some who blame everything that goes wrong on the referee. "I don't do it anymore," he told me, suggesting the abuse from parents is more than enough. "We're going to run into a big problem if we don't have referees for our kids."

"They're all trying. Put yourself in their place. How would you like somebody constantly berating you no matter what you did?"

One of the things that has worked with coaches is that referees go over before games and introduce themselves and shake hands. A real live human being, imagine that.

We expect them to be, but referees aren't perfect, and neither are any of us. If we make a mistake, hopefully somebody isn't going to be yelling and telling us how stupid and incompetent we are. If they did, at least we would be in a position to defend ourselves.

We get caught up in the heat of battle, and most all of us are guilty of yelling at the referee at one time or another, including myself.

That doesn't make it right. In fact, it's so wrong.

Here's a suggestion. The next time you go to yell something at the referee think of whether you'd yell the same thing if it were your son reffing, or your husband, or father. And think about whether or not it would be okay with you if somebody kept yelling at your son or daughter that they were incompetent hockey players.

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