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## SPORTS: Stouffville players could jump to AA centres

# Minor hockey proposal 'potentially negative' for Stouffville

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA  
mhayakawa@yrmg.com

In a move that has been anticipated for months, the Ontario Minor Hockey Association's board of directors has voted to relax its long-standing residency policy and permit more players to play minor hockey outside their home communities.

The move will allow players to participate in tryouts with teams in single and double-A centres, providing their home centres do not possess those classifications.

### NEIGHBOURING AA CENTRES

For instance, the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association is a single-A calibre centre. Its players would be eligible to compete for positions with double-A teams in neighbouring areas including Markham, Aurora, Newmarket or Richmond Hill.

Players from double-A centres though, could not move horizontally to another centre below the triple-A level.

"Overall, I think it's good," OMHA executive director Richard Ropchan said of the vote. "The thinking is players in double-B centres and below that are late cuts at triple-A have another option to try out at a higher level. That means a chance to play and develop at a level at

which they are capable of playing." Centres are classified by population.

"It's creating a buzz and I think a positive buzz, so we'll see where it goes," Ropchan said. "Right now, we're doing baby steps. It's a small percentage of kids we feel need to be afforded that opportunity."

While details are far from established, Ropchan said the policy could be in place for the 2011-12 season.

Don Easter, Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association president, said if such a proposal were to come into effect it must be voted upon by the OMHA's members.

Among the details Easter would like to see clarified are the possible restrictions or limitations on player movement which have been advanced in relation to any rule change.

"These would include quotas for double-A and single-A centres on the number of non-resident players, and a limitation on the number of double-A or single-A teams a non-resident player could try out for," he said.

As for his feelings on the proposed change, Easter said there's positives and negatives to it.

With Whitchurch-Stouffville classified as a single-A centre, a sig-

nificant number of players in the past have honed their skills in the association to the point where they were able to compete successfully for positions on triple-A teams in other centres.

"On one hand we're sorry to see them go; but on the other hand, we see their success as a testimonial to the strength of our program," he said.

At this stage, Easter said their association needs to be convinced the proposed changes to the residency rules offers their members any significant added value.

In the past, Easter cited Clippers' entries have played on equal footing with double-A ranked rivals.

"Several years ago, our Clippers' bantam A team was ranked second compared to all the bantam double-A teams in the province," he cited of a team he once coached.

"On-ice results for both our single-A and AE programs have been improving each year and would place Stouffville among the top handful of single-A centres in Ontario from a competitive standpoint."

Helping to enhance the competitiveness of Whitchurch-Stouffville entries has been the recent opening of the Clippers' Complex twin-ice pad facility.

"The addition of two new ice

pads has allowed us to virtually double the practice time available to our rep teams this season and means they have as much or more skill development opportunity as most double-A or triple-A teams," he said.

At the same time, though, should a residency rule change result in any significant loss of players to double-A teams the ability of Clippers' rep teams to compete going forward could be impacted.

### LOCAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

"Since Stouffville borders on four centres offering double-A programs, like Markham, Richmond Hill, Aurora and Newmarket, we are potentially more vulnerable to player movement than some of the more geographically remote centres with which we compete. This is a potentially significant negative for our organization," Easter noted.

In the meantime, Easter said their organization will closely monitor the process and keep their members informed as more information becomes available.

"Once we have a more complete picture of the proposed changes we will provide our members with opportunities to make their views known and give our board some direction in representing these views to the OMHA," he said.

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