

Jr. A hockey league also playing with elimination of shootouts

Spirit big fans of inter-league games in OJHL

BY MICHAEL HAYAKAWA
mhayakawa@yrmg.com

Inter-conference play has been a hot topic during Ontario Junior Hockey League annual general meetings.

While the concept was discussed, nothing ever evolved from it — until this year's gathering in Mississauga last weekend.

After many years of debate, the concept was approved by the OJHL board of governors and will be instituted beginning in the upcoming campaign.

The new regular season schedule will see each member club, which includes the Stouffville Spirit, play 53 games comprised of 26 home games and 26 road games and one Governors' Showcase tilt.

Each club will play a home and home series against other conference teams and home and home series against other divisional teams within their conference. The remaining schedule will be against teams within their own

division.

Kenny Burrows, Spirit co-owner and general manager, felt the move was overdue.

However, he was quick to point out in past years, when the league had 37 teams, it was difficult for teams to play every other club.

And even when the league pared down to 30 entries it presented a challenge.

But now with 23 teams it is more viable.

"This is definitely for the better that all of the teams play each other," he said.

Other initiatives approved at the annual general meeting included a new criteria being established for the annual Rookie-of-the-Year Award.

To be eligible for the award, recipients must now be 18 years of age or younger as of Dec. 1 of the current season.

This new criteria aligns with the newly developed Canadian Junior Hockey League Rookie of the Year Award introduced this

past season.

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Also approved was a pilot project to be tested during the 2013-14 pre-season that will see the OJHL eliminate the use of a shootout following the four-on-four, five minute, sudden death overtime.

Instead, following the initial overtime period, the teams will play another five minute three-on-three overtime session.

"In my opinion, the shootout was just a gimmick. It created a lot of problems with kids showboating," Burrows said. "It definitely

wasn't a great way to end games."

Having seen three-on-three situations utilized in minor hockey tournaments, Burrows said it creates far more exciting competition.

Upon completion of the pre-season, further discussions will be held regarding the direction of the initiative and potential use in future seasons.

Burrows predicted the earliest this might be used is in the 2014-15 campaign.

"We'll see what happens," he said.

OJHL commissioner Marty Savoy commented on the positive steps the board of governors took in moving the league forward.

"I applaud the board of governors for the foresight that they showed this weekend in continuing to move the 'League of Choice' forward, while also being a leader in testing new rules aimed at improving the quality of the on-ice product," he said in a league media release.



KENNY BURROWS: Stouffville Spirit GM and part owner welcomes inter-league play in OJHL next season.

NOTEBOOK: Dustin Dagenais, one of the paramedics killed in last month's ORNGE helicopter crash in northern Ontario, played against the Spirit for the now-defunct Collingwood Blues during the late 1990s.



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