

Mandatory course takes aim at abusive hockey parents

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The Ontario Minor Hockey Association has a message for parents with youngsters playing the game.

And for that matter its coaches and other personnel.

Abuse, bullying and harassment must stop.

The association created a mandatory program in which at least one parent with a youngster playing house league, select, rostered select or rep hockey must take in preparation for the 2014-15 campaign.

Stemming from the association's annual general meeting last year, the Parent Respect In Sport seminar is a one-hour program that can be taken online.

The goal is to ensure the game is enjoyable and respectful for par-

ents, their children and other stakeholders in the game.

Team officials, on-ice officials and on-ice volunteers also have to complete the online program or an in-class Speak Out! certification.

With the Whitchurch-Stouffville Minor Hockey Association falling under the umbrella of the OMHA, they fully support this program.

FEW INCIDENTS LOCALLY

"As parents, we need to instill these values in our children and, just as critically, we must exhibit these same values through our own behaviour," said Don Easter, WSMHA president. "Like all minor sports organizations, we have dealt with some unfortunate examples of parents exhibiting a lack of respect for officials, coaches, players or other parents. While the number

of such incidents, has, fortunately, been relatively small, the level of acceptance needs to be zero."

Easter knows there will be skeptics.

In part because it was created because of a few bad apples who spoiled it for the majority and in which there is no hard data to suggest this program will actually work.

There could even be some people who feel it's just an exercise in political correctness.

"While acknowledging there may be an element of truth in such criticisms, (we) believe that on balance, the potential benefits outweigh these concerns, and that we need to view this initiative as one more tool for eliminating the types of behaviour that have no place in sport," he said.

With one son playing rep hockey with the Clippers tykes and another to be enrolled in house league next season, Shawn McGovern has no complaints with the OMHA's mandate.

"It's unfortunate that this (abuse, bullying and harassment) has to happen. But I think it's a good initiative," the Stouffville resident said. "If it's for the betterment overall then I am all for it."

BULLYING, HARRASSMENT

"Time will tell how effective this program will be," he said.

The WSMHA has said players may not be able to register with them for next season unless a parent has completed the program.

This could result in some difficulties for those players wishing to attend rep team tryouts in April

since they must be registered to try out.

The program could also set a standard for which other minor sports organizations might apply a program along the same lines.

George Karanopoulos, Stouffville Baseball Association president and a parent with four youngsters who play minor hockey, said Baseball Ontario has already taken steps to conduct a similar mandate this year.

In fact, there's been some discussions circulating that those taking the course and receiving accreditation will be able to transfer that if other minor sports apply a similar program.

To take the course, there's a one time fee of \$12 per family.

For more course information, log on to: www.omha.net or www.wsmha.com

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