

We have been reviewing the responses to the recent survey and we want you to know we are processing the data and your feedback is heard and appreciated. The good news is that for the most part, we have satisfied members, on average. We also recognize there are areas for improvement. The topics below were some areas we wanted to address right away:

## Ice time

There are lots of great suggestions and valid complaints regarding ice time. They range from complaints about the number of late practices certain teams have, the inconsistency of the concentration of practices, and most notably, that we are very 'front-loaded' with a lot of fall practice ice, but very little winter ice. We all agree that it is most unfortunate that our rink contracts give us lots of ice in the fall, when kids are playing fall sports and it would be better to have fewer touches during the conflict period. And on the flip side, once the prep-school season is in swing, we get very little ice, and it's during that part of the season that we really would want more ice. Unfortunately, we have to make do with what we have. We are constantly on the look-out for opportunities to contract more ice, but we haven't had a lot of luck. If you hear of any ice available within a reasonable distance, we are eager to learn about it and will follow up post haste. In the meantime, we are doing our best with the contacts we have, trying to negotiate for more and better hours at our favorite rinks.

Some things we will try to do better:

- Distribution of the less desirable hours: bantams, peewees and midgets should get even allotment of the late hours with understanding of the ranking of the sheets in terms of their desirability
- Distribution of the weekday early afternoon hours should likewise be distributed amongst the younger teams in a similarly reasonable way
- Track the 'score' of each teams ice-time to make sure that there is a balance at the end of the year

With all the above as a goal, it is worth noting that often the ice-times reflect coaches requests as some coaches can, under no circumstances, make certain times, and we try to accommodate such requests when possible.

To put some rumors to rest, we have no idea when Wellesley will finally have their own rink thereby freeing up more hours at Babson, but we are in contact with Babson and have our foot in the door, so to speak.

As for utilizing off-ice practice, we will have to look into the viability of (a) being able to secure school gym space and (b) whether or not USA Hockey insurance will cover ice-hockey related activities at non-rink locations (c) whether or not our coaches who volunteer so many hours already can fit this into their schedule.

Most people would be willing to venture a little further out for practices while a significant minority would take less ice so long as it were all local. Hopefully at some point down the road,

we will have our own rink. Until then, we will aim to find the right balance with the resources we have.

## Communication

We got a mixed grade on communication. We hope to improve this going forward and are especially interested in specific ideas on how to make the information on our website easier to find. We have a new volunteer for maintaining the website and he may create another survey to get more targeted feedback for that area.

## Costs

For the most part, NYH's costs were felt to be reasonable, but sometimes, we don't compare that well to other towns, so we thought it would be helpful to explain what your fees are paying for.

**Ice:** our most convenient rink is St Sebs, which is also one of the more expensive rinks around. Their rate is \$350 for hours after 4pm and \$250 before then.

**Skills:** Depending on the number of staff we have with us, our skills rate is around \$245 per hour.

**League fees:** For full-ice, games average about \$265 each. Not sure what the per-game break-down is for mites and development.

**Operations:** We pay for accounting services, league athletics (website), credit-card processing fees, tax-prep/audit fees, special events (volunteer appreciation, gifts, etc) which contributes to additional overhead.

**Overall:** We just about break even

## Tryouts

Tryouts were, predictably, the area that is the touchiest. Coordinating tryouts is time-consuming and a lot of thought has gone into keeping the process objective. We have attempted to make them as fair as possible, but there are still some areas of concern, based on the feedback. Some feedback actually made it sound like the tryout process may be too objective, since in other sports, there may be more continuity of teams year after year.

Unlike soccer up to U12, hockey is grouped in two-year age groups -- keeping teams consistent really isn't feasible unless we decided, as a program, to create single birth-year teams. And then, the issue would be that kids with Fall birthdays would end up playing with kids in a higher grade, and as first-years in an age-group, kids may face a team with all older players on it.

Since team continuity is not easily achievable, we have tried to focus on objectivity in tryouts. Independent evaluators are hired to rank skaters top to bottom based on ability. We know this is not an exact science, but we considered this the best we could do. Those rankings are then used by an age- level coordinator that is generally the A-level coach (either incumbent or leaving that level) and he and a group of coaches for that level then place the kids, using current coach evaluations to try and break ties or move around bubble players. During the tryout process the evaluators only have pinney numbers, no player names, in an effort to keep it as unbiased as possible. Very rarely have we had legitimate complaints about a player being seriously misplaced. Of course, players develop at different rates, and some may blossom between tryouts and the following season. And mistakes can be made -- these are humans doing the evaluating after all.

This Fall we have a new tryout coordinator coming aboard, Mike Spalla. We will work with him, taking into account all the feedback you have given, in hopes of continuously improving the process going forward. Our goal is to get players placed on appropriate level teams through the best possible process.

## Tournament

While in general there was a favorable response to the Frank Bell tournament, that it is fun and well run, there were also some suggestions (like, can we play music in the rink to pump it up? Can we get a t-shirt vendor with the custom stamps?).

We didn't do so well communicating which teams would play and why. Here is some background on the recent evolution of the tournament and the reasoning that leads to which teams play, etc. Only the top 3 Needham teams at each level have played in the tournament over the last 6+ years. This has not changed. the Frank Bell tournament has evolved to only the top 3 teams at each level (mite, squirt, girls, pw) participating in the tournament for the following reasons:

- there are more available teams at these levels across the board (not many clubs have the depth of a program as Needham does, many do not have the 4 and 5 levels in their program which gives us less teams to sign up or to choose from and to fill the tournament with)
- there is consistency in players/team play at these higher levels. Once we get to the 4 and 5 levels, and because the tournament takes place over the vacation break, we have found a tremendous amount of inconsistency in skills from team to team, a 4 is most likely not really a 4 because they have pulled up players for example. A mixed bag. One of the main tournament goals is to offer parity play at each level and track. These 4 & 5 levels, especially over a vacation week, are wild cards
- we cannot support any more levels/teams with the ice available to us (we continue to try to obtain more ice)
- we have added a girls track which maxes out the ice availability during the dates of the tournament

- Bantams have been typically unavailable and very difficult to fill tournament with due to the nature of that age group being some in middle school and some in high school, some half season, some not etc.
- Mites have wavered in and out due to cross-ice requirements and general interest at that level

For future reference and for those interested, St. Sebastians does put some restrictions on NYHA for the tournament. For example, Sebs does NOT allow music to be played through their sound system (although I guess we could bring a boom box of sorts), we cannot tape anything to the locker room doors, and we are limited to the amount of items we hang or post on the walls, we are limited to the number of banners etc...

T-shirt vendor is a great idea and has been considered in the past. Definitely a consideration for next year. In general, t-shirts do not sell that well except at the younger team levels.

Some suggested that kids prefer away tournaments and maybe we could make better use of the ice during vacation week to have skills and mini-camps. Our tournament committee is actively working on plans for next season and we will keep you posted. Thank you for your input.

## Coaching

For the most part, the feedback on coaches was really positive. Thank you to all the parents who volunteer so much time to develop these young players, and especially to those that are really positive influences and always keep it fun.

## Development

There is a legitimate concern that the Development players may have a tendency to fall further behind their peers because the development program is less intensive in terms of number of practices than travel. This is a legitimate concern. We initially structured the development program to be a bridge between in-house and travel. The hope was that we could gradually build interest in players without having them burn out in a more intensive program. For a child that truly wants to 'catch up', the best idea is to supplement development with private or semi-private lessons. If you would like some ideas for outside programs, please let us know and we will provide references.

## General feedback

Please know that if you wish to communicate directly, you can email me at [president@nyha.org](mailto:president@nyha.org) and I will do my best to ensure your complaints are heard and we will always strive to improve the organization going forward.