

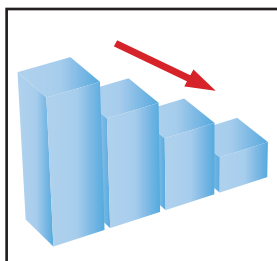


# Hockey Zones

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Tucker Hockey's Official Newsletter - Reinforcing Hockey's Positives to ALL ages!

For the LOVE of the GAME!



## The Minor Hockey Dilemma

Esso Minor Hockey week will run from January 13th to January 21st, 2012. It is recognized as the largest ice hockey tournament in the world. The tournament has brought Calgary teams together for 40 years and this year will be Esso's 32nd year as title sponsor. The tournament is prestigious in the minds of so many Canadian kids. It's a chance for players from novice to midget levels to get together for fun and competition. No event of this size could run smoothly without a dedicated group of volunteers, parents, officials and players. So hats off to the countless number of volunteers each year who provide the kids in Calgary and across Canada with the opportunity to play.

### The Situation:

Esso Minor Hockey week is just one example of how hockey is such a prominent part of the Canadian identity. However, the state of Canadian minor hockey as we know it today may look quite different in the next decade or so. Hockey Canada's membership peaked in 2008-09 when it hit 585,000 registered players. However,

enrolment is dropping by a little more than 1% a year, or 8,000 players, on the average, per year. The myth is that most Canadian boys play hockey, however, the reality is that the numbers are falling. Only 15.7%, or 1 in 6.4 boys, actually play the game in Canada. If the trend of young males deciding not to play hockey continues, the numbers are expected to lower to about 360,000 in 2021. On the opposite side, there's been a boom in female hockey, but the numbers do not make up for the decline in male participation. That trend could have a serious impact on Canada's international male dominance of the sport in the future.

### The Issues:

Here are some of the major reasons behind the predicted minor hockey registration dilemma:

- The increasing costs of participation each year, especially player registrations and hockey equipment. Individual player registrations range from a low of \$400 at the Initiation level to a high of \$3,500+ at the

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Look Inside for  
More Great Sports Tips

**“Everyone here has the sense that right now is one of those moments when we are influencing the future.”**

**~ Steve Jobs**

# Hockey Dilemma (Cont'd from Cover)

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Midget AAA level. Also, depending on the minor hockey association parents may be required to work bingos, casino nights, help conduct bottle drives, sell raffle tickets and / or yearbook advertising, purchase team apparel, participate in local and out of town tournaments or acquire additional practice ice times for the team. These additional fundraising activities require extra time and effort throughout the season or a cash call i.e. write a cheque to the team for additional funds in the neighbourhood of \$300 to \$1,000+. To suit a player in full equipment can range from \$1,000 to \$2,000 depending on the age and size of the player. For goalies, the cost is much higher.

- The perception of hockey as an increasingly violent sport in the public's eye. Hockey is portrayed as a violent sport based primarily on the contact aspect, otherwise known as checking. With an

increase of player concussions and enhanced media coverage this only magnifies the violent perception and issue within our game. This violence is enhanced and glorified in video games.

- We are living in an ever changing society where other sports, digital gadgets, youthful pressures from schools and part – time jobs take precedence over the game of hockey.
- A staggering and uncertain economy in parts of Canada has had a major effect on families' disposable income, to the point where many parents especially single parent households have had to make tough choices regarding their families' recreational activities.
- Minor hockey is dying in many small Canadian towns. As more and more families leave small towns to pursue job opportunities in urban centres, the population continues to

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## Next Issue Spring/Summer 2012 Features

- Instructor Profile - Ron Wong
- Hockey from a Czech Republic Perspective - Part II
- Kids Hockey Advancement Society Poker Tournament
- Calgary Flames End of Season Report

# Welcome to Hockey Zones

The official newsletter of Tucker Hockey. The Winter 2012 issue consists of fresh hockey education and teaching articles, an expression of hockey philosophies and viewpoints, addresses various hockey issues for public discussion, provides features on hockey people at the "Calgary grass roots rink level", features upcoming Tucker Hockey Adult and Minor Hockey programs, and provides hockey quotes, stories and prize contests. In summary, it will create good hockey ...  
 "Food for Thought!"

Enjoy your hockey - the World's Greatest Sport! - and I hope you enjoy our Tucker Hockey Newsletter!

- Past issues available at www.tuckerhockey.com -

# Hockey Dilemma (Cont'd from 3)

decline and the numbers of kids playing hockey is getting lower and lower. This requires amalgamation of rural associations to ice a complete team or teams which results in extended travel and extra associated costs.

- One of the many challenges for Hockey Canada is dealing with the pyramids of provincial bodies and the hundreds of minor hockey associations beneath them. There are 4 levels to the Minor Hockey pyramid, for example in Calgary: Hockey Canada, then Hockey Alberta, then Hockey Calgary, and then the 20 + local Calgary community associations. Each organization has its own goals and aspirations, and they don't always mesh with the level of the pyramid above or below them. In the past Hockey Canada's directives on change and improvement have not always been embraced and implemented for the betterment of the game at the grassroots levels.
- Lack of arena facilities and accessibility to those facilities. Even though Calgary is building new rinks, it will not solve the minor hockey problem if adult hockey continues to maintain and acquire earlier prime time ice, before 10 pm. Where small towns in Canada are begging for players, a city like Calgary has more players than available ice time slots. Currently, midget hockey games are finishing up as late as 11:30 pm on weeknights. Often local rinks are giving less and less time to minor hockey because the adults generate more income for the rinks. Minor hockey groups in Calgary get prime time ice time for \$150/hr whereas adult hockey is \$225/hr. There's an ever increasing desire for rink and facility managers to be topping up their capital reserve funds because aging facilities are requiring more capital expenditures on renovations. Also, increased ice demand from other sports such as ladies' hockey, ringette, sledge hockey, shinny hockey, short track speed skating, and of course, figure skating make it difficult to find reasonable time slots in Calgary and other major urban centres.
- Declining interest from a changing population. Low birth rates in Canada are being offset by a steady flow of immigration from non-hockey playing countries. Stats Canada data from 2006 states that among recent arrivals of immigrants, only 32% of their children participate in organized sports compared to 55% of those of Canadian born parents. Lack of financial stability is given as a major reason. Soccer is easily the most played game among youth in Canada with 20% of them getting their kicks from it. That compares to about 9% for hockey, a figure that in 1992 was 17.5%. Soccer is a sport with

the advantage of being instantly familiar to immigrants hailing from almost anywhere on earth. In Toronto 40% of the population consists of immigrants, in Calgary that number is nearly 30. Conversely, second generation Canadians are far more willing to put their kids in hockey because even though they may not have played the game they have been surrounded by it most of their lives. Parents who have participated in hockey take a more hands on approach with their kids because they can relate to it and both child and parent share in the enjoyment of the game.

- Getting the right start. The toughest part of playing hockey is that you have to learn to skate before you can begin to master the other skills of the game. Other sports such as baseball and soccer do not require a person to master balancing on thin metal blades before learning to throw or kick. It's a lot more challenging sport to learn than first meets the eye. As well, parents that don't know how to skate are less inclined to enrol their kids in hockey, as they cannot participate in their kids' development directly.
- At the lower levels of minor hockey sometimes coaches deliver the wrong philosophy – winning over having fun and developing the players' skills to advance to the next level. Also, many of the coaches are limited in their qualifications / experience and ability to teach proper skating technique and hockey skills to the kids.

## The Solutions:

- More corporations need to step up and create sponsorship programs to help grow the game, such as subsidizing and funding registrations and equipment for players, as well as help with building more facilities. For example an Ottawa based company has launched a website to help families cope with the soaring cost of their kid's hockey. The website is already up and running in the Ottawa area, and the company hopes to expand to at least 8 to 10 other Canadian cities. The website is [www.communityengage.com](http://www.communityengage.com).
- Governing hockey bodies, at all levels, have to do a lot more to ensure the game grows with a special emphasis on making the game safer especially at the lower levels and educating parents on the benefits of proper protective equipment when worn properly such as securing the chin strap on a helmet. As well as the zero tolerance for head shots, a zero tolerance

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# Hockey Dilemma (Cont'd from 34)

for head shots, a zero tolerance for fighting at all levels of hockey needs to be enforced!

- Attracting immigrants to the game is a key to keeping the registration numbers up. Our governing hockey bodies need to produce educational and promotional materials in different languages and put on more hockey seminars to educate people, especially parents, about the game. Currently, Hockey Canada is looking at technology to translate its promotional literature into 17 different languages. More time, studies and monies need to be directed to grassroots hockey to help grow the game throughout the country.
- Parents need the choice available to have their children participate in contact or non-contact hockey. More time and monies need to be directed to safety first and checking clinics / resources to prepare the players for contact hockey. Players participating at a level below AA, such as house / less competitive leagues do not need to be playing contact hockey because the sport has become more recreational than competitive / elite.
- Recruitment and retention are the key words for the governing hockey bodies – it's about selling our great game. Making the minor hockey season more flexible, such as 3 or 4 mini seasons will make the system fit with the demands of the modern family. This will create opportunities for some kids to play year round while also allowing other kids to work hockey into an already busy schedule. Encouraging less out of town road trips and tournaments will limit costs, so that a single parent family with multiple children can afford to participate in the game.
- Improvements to the federal family tax credits for participating in sports especially hockey to encourage and reward increased participation and involvement for kids and adults.
- Dedicate more time, monies and resources to improve on minor hockey coach mentoring. More properly motivated coaches are needed at the lower levels of hockey because if we have good coaches at the lower levels, it's easier to retain players, to instill a love of the game and teach "fundamental" skating and hockey skills. This will help kids enjoy their hockey experience and should keep them participating in the game longer - even after their playing days are over.

## Editor's Note:

*Currently, the Calgary minor hockey situation is quite strong and growing. We have 13,500 players participating, from ages 5 to 21. The city's population dynamic consists of many young affluent families and a continuing growing base. The biggest challenge is the lack of adequate facilities to handle the increasing usage demand. The City of Calgary has approximately 60 indoor arenas and definitely could use another 6 to 8 new facilities in the next couple years. Whether the city will receive federal funding for those well needed projects is debateable? Nevertheless, the city has a bright hockey future. However, because Canada is so large and regionalized, the problem solutions that work in large centres such as Calgary are foreign to those in rural areas – where declining enrolment is the biggest issue, not lack of facilities.*

*Looking at the world stage, the biggest threat to Canada's hockey domination is the USA. The United States has 10 times the population and 100,000 fewer hockey players than Canada does at this point in time. However, times are changing. Apparently, there are more rinks being built in the state of Minnesota in one year than there are built in all of Canada. Hockey is being played at some level in all 50 states. Even non – traditional hockey states are turning out elite hockey players. Due to more rinks and efforts by USA Hockey to grow the game, last season registrations were 475,000. It's just a matter of time before the USA surpasses Canada in the total number of minor hockey players registered! It's worth noting that Canada is not alone with declining registrations. Both Sweden and Finland are also experiencing challenges in recruiting players. As well, Russia, with a population of 139 million and a rich historical hockey tradition, has only 63,500 boys in hockey.*

*A future decline in the overall Canadian minor hockey enrolment base will have an adverse effect on the number of players available to compete within Canadian high performance level programs. Hockey Canada's vision is that every kid plays hockey, but that's not the way it is and the major stakeholders within our great game need to make proactive and cooperative measures at all levels of hockey – community, city, provincial and national - to ensure Canada maintains its position as a hockey superpower! From child to adult - every Canadian should have an opportunity to participate in the great game of hockey!*

**Sport is a preserver of health.  
~Hippocrates**